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The red rock wilderness. 1957.

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THE  
*Red Rock Wilderness*



By Elspeth Huxley

The red rock wilderness  
shall be my dwelling place. . . .

Sidney Keyes

WILLIAM MORROW & COMPANY  
New York • 1957

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# Introduction

IT IS with considerable reluctance that I have agreed to the publication of these private journals written by my son, Andrew Colquhoun. It would still, I imagine, be considered reprehensible to strip to the buff at Hyde Park Corner, but to invite the public to share the intimate details of one's private life carries no such stigma. But then I am no doubt an old fogey who has failed to move with the times.

It may be asked why the responsibility for deciding whether or not to make these journals public should have fallen on me. The MS was (as my son explains) sent to me for safekeeping by M. Rivière, a former district officer in the Afrique Équatoriale Française. Anyone who reads newspapers will no doubt recall the outcry following the perplexing events at Luala which, although written about *ad nauseam*, are now for the first time accurately described. In spite of this public outcry, in spite of the frenzied probings of the press, in spite of the concern of several governments, the truth was never disentangled from the mass of rumours, speculations and plain lies which flourished with a true tropical exuberance. As a typical example, I may mention the "truth" unearthed by a well-known daily newspaper whose "special investigator" proclaimed to the world that he had interviewed Dr. Clausen in Baku, where he was working in the Soviet cause on biological warfare.

It was with the dual aim of putting an end, once and for all, to these fantastic stories, and of clearing the name of my son, that I at last yielded to the pressure put on me from sev

eral quarters to let the public judge for themselves. I handed these diaries over to a competent editor who, while cutting out some irrelevant matter, has left intact many passages which seem to me too intimate for publication and unnecessary to the main purpose. However, I respect the editor's integrity and abide by my undertaking not to interfere, and merely put on record an opinion which might belong to the dodo (whatever a dodo may have been) for all the attention paid to it nowadays.

It might be thought that the question of publication was a matter for the son and not the father. The events that Andrew here describes, and his subsequent hardships, so deeply affected him that his only wish was to put them right out of his mind. Before leaving for Canada, therefore, he returned his journals to me and asked me to do with them as I thought fit, but on no account to refer to him in regard to any decision. He wanted to burn them, but was restrained by the feeling that he had no right to destroy the only evidence that exists, or ever can exist, as to the truth of what the newspapers call "the great Clausen scandal" or the "jungle mystery." Although I am certain that his reluctance to see them published would have been even greater than mine, I believe he would endorse my decision if only to scotch these absurd and malicious rumours that have grown up around the name of a man who, above all others, he respected and revered.

And so, let the truth be told. I can only hope that these diaries will serve a useful purpose by the light they throw on one of the most remarkable, many-sided, baffling and unlucky characters of our day, and on the sinister and yet inevitable forces he so tragically engaged.

Duncan Colquhoun, Lt.-Col. (Rtd.)  
Strathnashellach,  
Scotland

## BOOK ONE

# *The Journey*

I STARTED by taking a look at the town. At first you think that someone must have dropped a middle-west American city on to the African plain. The setting is that of bare furrowed hills, a heat-dazed plain stretching to infinity: the gem, so to speak, consists of new or half-built semi-skyscrapers, heat-reflecting intersecting streets, and cars, thousands and thousands of cars, all throwing off white sunlight like a lot of coloured moving mirrors. Cars parked everywhere, or moving stem to stern.

All in this hard, dry heat, under blinding sunshine. There's something gritty in the atmosphere, it hurts the eyes. You must have dark glasses. And when you've got them you see at once that there's nothing in the least American about the people—Indian rather. Indians by the thousand, bearded and turbaned or with sleek brown faces and dark quick eyes and some wearing their shirts outside their trousers; deft brown hands busy behind counters, sing-song tongues busy in the streets. They look purposeful. Mostly men—but here and there a nutmeg-coloured woman in a powder-blue or plum-red sari splashes colour into the street.

These brown men look more at home here than the black. Either the blacks look dazed and ragged, or self-consciously overdressed in drill suits and ties and tilted hats, with a swagger that may be a defensive bluff. They move with a sort of grace, as if the barefooted lope of the tribesman hadn't

completely died out in them. But it soon will. The city's sucking them in as it's sucked in all of us, draining away their innocence and putting in its place anger and sourness.

Out of the white glare (fragments of quartz in the building stone, I think, intensify it) I walked into the market. What a contrast! Cool, shaded and smelling of oranges and flowers. Piles of every fruit you can imagine, beacons of brilliant colour on the stalls; flowers grouped around the base of a stairway; vendors come at you like beetles around a lamp, you brush them off but they don't mind, they surge back imploring and extolling in voices less raucous than market voices generally are.

One man was a cripple, he walked like a crab with a twisted leg, his bony face and big eyes had the mute animal look of endurance you see in the deformed. He gestured towards a great bank of Madonna lilies. How could I carry Madonna lilies through the street to my stuffy little back room, at least a mile away through the hot car-crawling streets? Did he deliver? Yes, yes, he did. They were cheap, the lilies. I paid five shillings and scribbled on a scrap of paper: "The Matron of the Hospital, African branch." I don't know how they manage those things here. The cripple stared at it and nodded his head several times, mystified. I don't suppose the lilies will ever arrive.

Shooting very much into the blue, I asked, "Do you know a man called James Gichini?"

The cripple reflected and then shook his bony head. I don't think he spoke much English. Then a man who'd been standing near stepped forward: a smooth customer with sharp features for an African, well-dressed, a felt hat tilted over one eye.

"You want somebody here?"

"Not here. An old friend of mine, a lawyer, James Gichini. I'm not even sure that he's in Nairobi."



"You have seen him lately?"

I didn't care for this man, he wore an air indefinably familiar and oiled with contempt. "It doesn't matter," I said.

"I do not know this man, James Gichini. But if he is here perhaps I may find him."

"Don't bother," I said abruptly, and walked away. Somehow he had spoiled the market for me, the market which, for an instant, with its coolness and the cripple and his lilies, had shone with the lustre of paradise. It was crowded. White women in print dresses, hatless mostly, picked their way about with shopping baskets, feeling fruit and poking vegetables, like women in France. One had a boy walking behind her with the basket—very regal. She had that look of disdain which can strike sparks of hatred, unless beauty carries it off. She had no beauty, though she was handsome in an angular, dessicated way. She looked at me blankly for an instant and then the crowd swallowed her.

Outside, in a street lined with jacarandas (each tree standing in a little pool of violet-blue made by fallen petals) I bought all the papers I could find. There was the important daily, the *Standard*, and one or two others. The one I chose was a little weekly rag, very badly printed on cheap paper and obviously written by the editor-proprietor. It was called, frankly enough, just *Buzz*. A scandal-sheet, but in addition the editor seemed to have a message. It took some time to locate the office, which was in the Indian section, a confusing jumble of streets absolutely packed with people, noisy and seething with life. At last I found a doorway in a seedy building whose paint was flaking off the concrete; I climbed a dirty narrow wooden stair and came to a room without a carpet, full of chairs and tables and papers; inside were two

clerks (Africans) in shirt sleeves, wearing the traditional eye-shades of green celluloid, copied no doubt from American films.

The editor had a room to himself beyond, if you could call it a room; a box-hole really, just large enough for him to tip back his chair and rest his head against the wall so that he couldn't topple. His hair had left a dark greasy stain on the wall. He was a bulky man with a shock of pale ginger hair, now greying unevenly. His shoes were cracked and his nails dirty, but when he spoke to me I only noticed his eyes, which were a greeny blue, like ice. There was an intensity about them, a concentration, a sort of innocence I liked. He spoke with an Australian accent and said his name was Tantrum, and launched himself immediately on to a choppy sea of words from which I soon discovered that he was a Yellow Peril merchant, or a Brown Peril rather.

The bee in his bonnet, a loud bee—how rightly he'd named his paper—was the Asian Menace. He saw a great brown flood from India sweeping over Africa and thought it his duty to warn the citizens. There was a lot about culture, Christianity and the birth rate. I rather liked him, crazy as he was. At last he left the Asian Menace long enough to ask me what I wanted.

I explained that I was on my way to Luala, but that a brakeless lorry had flattened out my Vespa near Dodoma.

"Luala," he said. "What a crackpot place to want to reach."

"It's not the place, it's the man."

"Yes—Ewart Clausen. The cleverest publicity merchant of the twentieth century, and that's saying a lot."

"The publicity came to him," I protested. "He didn't make it."

"There's a bloke," said Tantrum, "who sits himself down on his fanny in the middle of an equatorial forest, just as far

as he can get from trouble, and does what? Contemplates his navel. Philosophizes. Cogitates. Now don't mistake me, I'm not one of those who thinks that all a man needs is a pair of arms, a pair of legs and two appetites. Man is a thinking animal and it's right he ought to think. Ewart Clausen thinks. All right. But why does he have to do his thinking right off the map, sit like a mock sage under a property Bo tree away from the dust of the market place and expect us all to listen to what he has to say?"

"He doesn't expect it. People go without invitations. Besides, hermits and seers—"

"Rot!" Tantrum exclaimed. "Clausen thinks about the wrong things. What's the use of nattering about 'a mind in balance' when the great brown flood is gathering strength to sweep us all off the map? Anyway, where do you come in?"

"I want to write his biography."

"Write about something that matters," Tantrum advised. "Write about these facts I've been giving you. Wake people up. Is writing your trade?"

"I've earned my living from it so far, more or less. I can do you a piece on getting here from Cape Town on a second-hand motor-scooter if you like."

"It's been done too often."

"On a motor-scooter?"

"Perhaps not that. But . . ." The idea didn't appeal. "What's your next move?"

I told him I wanted to get to Lua-la but I had very little money and no means of transport, and had to find both.

"I'll print five hundred words on *that*, if it's good enough," he said. "Make it personal. Why you want to sit at the foot of this crackpot philosopher, what he means to you and so on."

I said that no one could put much of Clausen into five hundred words. It wasn't only his ideas, his clear-thinking

brain free of cant and predigested notions, that so much attracted me, it was the man's life, his past achievements, his brilliance, his humanity, his character. In a word, his greatness. He seemed to me a giant among men.

"Well, say it, say it," Tantrum ordered. "But I can't pay more than forty shillings."

I thanked him, but added that this wouldn't take me very far towards Lua-la. He asked me if I knew anyone in Nairobi. No, I said—and then added, except an African called James Gichini.

"Is he a pal of yours?" I could feel at once a change of attitude; he seemed to stiffen, not bodily but in mind. I had known Gichini in London, I said.

"London's one thing, Nairobi's another. If you want to earn some money you'd do better not to claim him as a long-lost comrade."

"You know him, then?"

"He's a well-known character, is our James. I daresay he's as clever a barrister as any in town, even Indians. If I had a hundred shillings for every rogue and sneak thief he's got off I'd be a millionaire. But then our law here hasn't got meshes—it's a series of loopholes strung together with red tape."

"He doesn't sound as if he'd be hard to find."

"About as hard to find as the New Stanley Hotel. Go around to the law courts and you'll see him any day, or look him up in the telephone book."

Of course, I felt a fool. I just hadn't thought of the telephone book, perhaps because once you're in Africa you think subconsciously you're in the land of jungles, lions, pioneers and witch doctors, whereas really, in a place like Nairobi, you're just as much among the street lights and super-cinemas and filling stations as you are in Detroit or Birmingham.

"I don't know how well you know Gichini," Tantrum added. "He's been smart enough to keep out of trouble and

right out of open politics. He doesn't join movements or make speeches or write letters to the press. He sticks to his job—outwardly. But underneath it all—"Tantrum glared at me, and there was a wild sort of gleam in his eyes. He leant forward across the stained deal table. "I'll tell you this, and you can work it out for yourself. He's in with the Indians. Deep in with them—like that." He clasped his hands. "He's been to Delhi. He's their tool."

Tantrum's mind had edged back on to its single track. He sees the whole world through this screen of obsession. Now I don't know whether everything he said about James Gichini was nonsense, or only part of it. However, I promised to bring him in a piece about Ewart Clausen next morning and he came around sufficiently to say:

"I don't live in much style. Can't afford to, it costs you ten pounds to sneeze in this town. In fact I live in a bit of a dump. If you don't mind that, come and see me." He gave the address.

I found the place last night. The old boy lives in considerable squalor in half a house somewhere on the outskirts of the town, belonging to an Indian, with a piece of duty ground around it that no one has troubled to turn into a garden. His rooms are stuffed with books, magazines and manuscripts; he must take in two dozen periodicals and I don't suppose he reads a tenth of them. He's a dipper-in. There's a sideboard full of tarnished silver cups won for athletics, some of them going back to Sydney University, and a cigarette box presented to him by his colleagues on a newspaper in Brisbane on the occasion of his marriage in 1909. So the old boy must be about seventy—but as full of steam as a kettle. He doesn't drink.

I asked him how I could make enough money to get to Lua-la in the cheapest possible way.

"What can you do?"

A question, indeed. "At present I'm a sort of peasant writer. I scratch a living with my pen. Subsistence journalism." In recent years, I added, I'd done other things: dish-washing in America (mechanized, not as scruffy as it sounds), deck hand on a yacht, farm work in Denmark, teaching in a West Indian school.

"You're not a sticker," Tantrum observed.

"I haven't yet found anything I want to stick to."

Then I propounded one of my theories: just as an embryo (we're told) goes through the main stages of human evolution before it becomes a full-blown infant, so should a man go through the stages of his race before he becomes a full-blown individual. Man started as a food-gatherer and hunter. Then he became a tiller of the soil. Now he lives by machinery and exchange. So a young man should be a food-gatherer of the mind, a hunter of experience. Then, when he's gathered a store of knowledge and impressions, he settles down to dig, sow and reap. He raises a family. In old age he lives easily by the work of others, having his store of skill and knowledge to exchange. That's how I see it, anyway; that's the plan of my life. I'm reaching now the end of the food-gathering, experience-hunting period. My life of Ewart Clausen will be my first solid achievement, the start of the tilling stage.

I put a little of this into the piece I gave Tantrum to read. (Much more than five hundred words.) He lay back in a broken-sprung armchair and scratched an ankle while he read, and sniffed loudly now and then. I waited anxiously; I still haven't been able to conquer the feeling of apprehension, the wish to have my work approved. His approval was lukewarm.

"It'll do. But it's only got half the story. It tells me you're

an idealistic, rather naïve young man. It doesn't say what Clausen's got to offer you, or offer anyone."

"You asked for five hundred words."

"I'm willing to concede that Clausen has a great intellect, a spotless character and a gift of the gab. He was an explorer and mountaineer. I admire that. I'm ready to accept anyone's word that he was a big shot in the scientific world. Then he turned his back on it all and sat down in equatorial Africa. That's what sticks in my gullet. We used to have an old-fashioned word for blokes who did that. We called them quitters."

Quitters, I argued, ducked out of awkward situations, Clausen had done the opposite. "The position he left was safe and distinguished; he could have gone to Harvard, if he'd wanted to, as a sort of honorary professor. Instead of that, he's turned his back on fame and riches, because he wants to be absolutely free to follow the intellectual hares that chase about all over his head. Surely it isn't quitting to leave a subject you're master of in order to follow one that will always be master of you?"

But Tantrum was not to be convinced.

"All that sounds very high and mighty, but where does it leave the rest of us struggling mortals? It's *we* who stay behind with hydrogen bombs and race hatreds and nationalist plots, with strikes and taxes and envy and malice, with telephones and duodenal ulcers and all the rest of the twentieth-century bag of tricks. I'd swop it all any time for a nice quiet perch in Equatoria with lots of black servants and devoted disciples, a good frig and fresh lettuces and free laundry and no telephone. I'd think a lot of high-class thoughts myself then. Does *that* get the world fed and clothed, and governments elected, and criminals caught? Where should we be if every educated bloke sat on his bum in the shade with a soft drink and philosophized? And where will *he* be when the

Asian Menace blots out Western civilization like a dust storm burying a heap of old bones?"

And so we got back to the Asian Menace, and I had to listen for a long time, with only half a pint of beer to console me. He made it impressive, I must say; he's studied the subject inside out. Perhaps the Asians *will* overwhelm us in the end, when the Russians have taught them Western techniques. Tantrum saw this country as a frontier where Asian and European meet, with Africa the prize. I daresay he's right. But if he is, what can he or I do about it? Aren't these great impersonal causes, these trends of history, for the individual a mere waste of energy?

And all this, I told him, didn't solve my simple personal problem. Tantrum shrugged his shoulders. If I'd been an electrician, now, a mechanic, an accountant, a printer—any kind of technician—that would have been easy. Or if I'd wanted a three-year contract there were jobs with the government, the oil firms, the police. . . . As it was. . . . He shook his head.

"Isn't there *anything*, then?" I examined my hands: the spatulate type, indicative of a practical disposition. "I'm strong, willing, not an imbecile, free of trade-union apron strings."

Tantrum looked at me and laughed. "There's only one thing I can think of offhand," he said. "Easy work and quite well paid."

"Well, then . . ."

"Baby-sitting."

"I thought you might take this seriously," I said. "It's a serious matter for me."

Tantrum laughed again. "You may not like it, but I am being serious. Since the trouble here, some parents think a man with a gun more useful than a woman with a feeding bottle. Still, if it affronts your dignity we'll try for some-



thing more conventional. I'll advertise you in the paper. Free."

Old Tantrum is being very kind to me. I think he's lonely, and I don't suppose the Asian Menace brings him many friends. Or much of a circulation, either, for *Buzz*.

At last I tracked down James Gichini. I found him in his office in a dingy building off the main thoroughfare. Bookies and moneylenders seemed to occupy the other rooms. But there was James, clean-shaven now, round-faced, and smiling just as merrily, prosperous-looking in a light grey suit. We met like old friends. I noticed he had a girl clerk—rather unusual; most of the jobs that with us belong to women are done here by men.

"I heard that you were looking for me," James said.

"How was that?"

"Bush-telegraph. This is a town of over a hundred thousand people but in many ways it is a village still. You see, I know what goes on." He laughed, and I thought of the man in the market.

"You've acquired fame," I said.

James smiled again and shrugged his shoulders. The loss of his beard makes him look less benign and quizzical and gives his face a more ordinary appearance. Yet it's still a noticeable face. His movements are slow, almost indolent, but I think he'd drive to his purpose like a bullet. His desk was tidy and almost clear of papers and a big steel filing-cabinet in the corner spoke of efficiency; the curtains, in green and white stripes, were gay and clean; a vase of marigolds stood on the table.

"You mustn't be deceived by appearances," James remarked, aware that I had inspected his room. "Every thief

and beggar comes to me for help. I run a free meal service for underdogs. And thieves, beggars and underdogs may be deserving individuals but they're seldom rich ones."

"You're building up a reputation," I suggested.

He laughed. "They say: happy is the country with no history; and happy is the man with no reputation, in this part of the world. Do you know the wisest creature in the animal kingdom?"

I shook my head.

"The chameleon. On grass he's green, on a tree he's brown and on a stone he turns grey. And he has a long, quick tongue. The perfect politician!"

"Are you sorry that you came back?"

"Is a cook who works very hard to prepare a certain dish sorry when it is eaten? That was my purpose. I am in my native land."

"I like it, but I want to leave it," I said, and explained to him my need to find the cheapest route to Luala. He looked thoughtful, almost stern—my memories of him were nearly all of merriment—and sat without speaking for several moments, doodling on his blotting pad.

"You speak of something very difficult," he said.

"Yet people get about without much money. Africans do. They wander about all over the continent."

"You are not an African."

"I've no objection to living like one."

James gave an impatient twitch of his shoulders. "What a very European remark! You're all the same. Scratch a European and underneath you find—arrogance. *You* don't mind living like one. . . ."

"I'm sorry, that seemed to me a perfectly harmless remark." I added, "What's eating you, James? You never used to fly off the handle."

James stopped frowning and apologized. "Perhaps it's

something in the atmosphere that infects us all, in time. Like dust in the air. . . . You see, an African can travel almost anywhere because of our tradition of hospitality, by which any stranger who comes in peace must be offered food and shelter. Like most of our traditions it's dying, but there's enough left to take me to Luála, for instance, if I wanted to go, with only a few shillings in my pocket. But not you. Europeans invented money, they brought it here and they live by it; they can't expect to do without it when they happen to have run out."

"But I don't expect to," I protested. "You misunderstand."

Something had gone seriously wrong with this reunion of old friends to which I'd so much looked forward. How had I offended him? It didn't seem to make sense. I got up and walked to the window and watched the people in the street, Indians mostly, hurrying by, the moving cars, a black man in ragged shorts and an old hat asleep in a doorway, a woman with an upright gait, her head thrown back, her breasts high, almost sailing past, with jangling ornaments. The girl clerk was filing papers in the cabinet with slow, gentle movements, as if in a dream. I turned to James and spoke out.

"If you don't want to help me, or even to see me again, you've only got to say so. I simply came for some advice—and because I'd looked forward to seeing you. All right, you're busy, and quite frankly bloody-minded, and I'll clear out."

I started to do so, but James almost bounded from his chair and gripped me by the arm. And now he was laughing again as I remembered him.

"You're right," he said, "it's foolishness, you've shown me what a stupid frame of mind I'm getting into. We must be friends again as we used to and of course I'll help you if I can; you helped me often; let's go out and have some food and talk it over."

And so we went out together to find his car parked by the curb, and drove through the Indian quarter, crowded and noisy and smelling of heat and humanity and dust and something indefinable—could it have been the spices on sale in every other open-fronted shop?—and into a section where the houses thinned out and became residential. All were bungalows, shapeless objects with the stucco flaking off in patches and no gardens, just untidy squares of ground and dry, straw-coloured grass worn down to powdery dust. Why no trees? The glare's everywhere—off the tarmac, off the houses, off the biscuit-coloured ground. We halted outside one of the bungalows which had a green corrugated-iron roof. Two dusty oleander bushes flanked the steps leading to the narrow veranda.

"I rent half a house from an Indian," James said. "You must forgive the lack of amenities, and make yourself at home."

"You don't have to keep apologizing."

"It's a habit."

James shouted in his own tongue and a girl appeared, rather an attractive girl in a seal-like way—sleek and plump and smooth; she was barefooted and high-breasted and wore a cotton frock with nothing much underneath and a flowered handkerchief around her head. She smiled and spoke in a soft voice like a dove. I wondered what James had done about a wife, if anything: girls of his own race up to his intellectual level must be rare or nonexistent. Perhaps that doesn't worry him. He said:

"We'll have lunch here, if you don't mind African food—but I must stop apologizing. I'm afraid the girl speaks no English, but she's a good cook, and that's more important. Don't you agree?"

"More useful, certainly."

"That means you don't agree, Andrew. You think she

should be at school learning about wars between Protestants and Catholics, or the style of dead English poets, instead of cooking meals for me and having babies—no, not mine, I assure you, she's one of my family. Aren't there troubles enough without seeking a wife who will be too busy saying 'You are quite wrong; have you forgotten your education?' to put salt in the cooking pot and sweep the floor? You see, Andrew, I have become a reactionary. Now, why are you so anxious to reach this distant Luala, which is a long way from civilized places and probably consists of nothing but a few huts in a bush full of monkeys?"

When I explained, my project puzzled James, as it had Tantrum. He asked, "Will you make money out of this book?"

"I might."

"There have been books already, about this man Clausen. I saw one written by a woman."

"Yes. He's cursed with disciples and some of them have written books that must annoy him, full of adulation. Mine won't be like that."

"You have made up your mind," James said.

We had a big meal: thick soup embellished with lumps of meat and then a curry, very hot, with piles of rice and various unidentifiable objects in it. We drank beer. James does himself well. The room was barely furnished, the cheap carpet full of holes and the walls hung with luridly coloured religious pictures—his landlord's, James said, no doubt bought cheap at a sale.

James seemed less ebullient and amused at life, more pre-occupied. I suppose that's natural. He's older, half his mind was probably on his current case and I'd dropped in from another world. There was something in his attitude not exactly hostile, but stiff and—watchful, I was going to say. Whenever I mentioned Luala, I felt I was tapping a piece of metal that

gave back no ring. Almost I got the feeling that he doesn't want me to go. Why? Lua-la can mean nothing to him, nor do my actions concern him. Yet there was this curious leaden feeling when the subject was broached.

As he drove me back into town he said, "You really mean to make this crazy expedition, Andrew?"

"I don't think it is crazy."

He said nothing until we drew up near his office. Then he looked at me. His eyes didn't twinkle as they used to, I thought them hard: but what can one see in these dark brown irises merging into black pupils—isn't it an illusion to suppose that one can read anything in the eyes?

"The trouble with you, Andrew, is that you're too romantic. You think that something wonderful and beautiful awaits you around the next corner of the road."

"Something interesting, rather."

"No—because what's ugly you don't find interesting. You turn your back on it."

"Why do you think I shall find Lua-la disillusioning?"

"I never said that."

"You're hinting it plainly."

"You might not find Clausen as great a man as you imagine him to be."

"That's always possible. It doesn't prevent my wanting to find out."

James sighed. "You're obstinate. It's a pity you didn't take to climbing mountains or looking at the bottom of the sea, something like that. You want to explore human characters and they are not so simple."

"Well," I said, "you won't put me off. I hoped you might have helped me to get there."

He surprised me by laying a hand on my arm and looking at me with a frown; I've seldom seen him like that, so serious.

"Take my advice, Andrew," he said. "Don't go to Luala."  
"Why?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I think you'll waste a lot of time and get nothing out of it."

I shook my head. "My father was a mule."

James laughed—I suppose he gave up. "That would make you something very remarkable. You're absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, then . . . I'll see if I can help you."

We got out and shook hands, and he went back to his office. It's queer. But I'm sure that now he's said he'll help me he will, if he can.

I'm working now for a photographer, mainly retouching negatives. In this hot weather, with the sun outside, it's stuffy, galling, claustrophobic work, but not badly paid and, now I'm living with Tantrum, I can save. All my colleagues are Indians: hard-working, deft and uncommunicative. I think they resent my presence here.

Today someone left a message with Hirji, one of the Indians, to say that James Gichini would meet me at five o'clock outside the law courts. I hung about, rather fed up, for over an hour and then he turned up in high spirits and smelling of brandy.

"Come on," he said, "come to my house. I have something to tell you." So we went. A couple of his friends were there whose names I didn't catch: one, a burly, rather stout man with very frizzy hair who (James said) was a "businessman," the other, small-boned and ferretlike with steel-rimmed glasses, a "town councillor." James produced a bottle of brandy and gave each of us half a tumblerful. He said he was engaged on a murder trial and told us all about it—a long,

twisting story, involving witchcraft and a clash between two philosophies: ours, which calls it superstition, and theirs, which calls it truth.

It took him about an hour to get to the point.

"Andrew," he said at last, "do you still mean to go on this crazy safari?"

"To Lua!a? I'd like to start tomorrow."

"Not tomorrow. But you can start in three days. That is, if you don't mind travelling with your humble, obedient servant." He made a little bow. When James got worked up he sometimes used these archaic phrases with a half-mocking air. I was amazed. Surely he had no wish to go to Lua!a?

"Not so far as that. But I have business in Kampala and if you like I can take you there in my car. It will be on the way, and I shall leave you to continue your journey."

I jumped at it, of course, and said that I'd pay half the petrol, but he waved aside my suggestion. The businessman and the town councillor, it seems, are coming too.

The girl brought in a meal of chupattis (dull, indigestible things) and a very hot sauce which burned the back off my mouth. James said I must treat it with brandy and talked about Cambridge and his undergraduate days.

"I had good friends there," he said more than once. "There's no college like Caius." And I believe he meant it—a queer sort of loyalty, but genuine. "It was founded in 1348." He had *belonged* to Caius, it had accepted him on equal terms and it's something solid and kindly in a world that must often seem deceptive as a mirage and, in its values, as insubstantial as a puff of smoke.

In three days I shall be off! It seems too good to be true.



When we said good-bye my colleague Hirji, who's been more friendly than the others, presented me with a parcel wrapped in fancy paper. We shook hands formally and he gave me also the address of a brother-in-law in Kampala, and told me I'd be welcome there. The parcel turned out to be a photograph of himself in tennis regalia, looking fierce rather than sportive. It had his signature in the corner, and something in Gujarati. I was rather touched.

We were to start at seven o'clock on Monday morning, but James never turned up, and later sent a message to say he was kept by urgent business, and the next day it was the town councillor who was detained. I had to keep telling myself that punctuality is a Western virtue elsewhere regarded as a form of slavery to time: that clocks should be servants, not masters. It's largely a matter of climate, I think. Where there are winters, people had to spend most of the summer preparing for them, as a squirrel lays in nuts; that drummed in forethought, timing, as the price of survival; in the tropics, where winter never comes, the squirrel never lays in nuts, life drifts on very pleasantly from day to day.

However, we got going in the end, in good time on Wednesday morning. It was wonderful to get out of the town. Nairobi's subtopian straggle is almost redeemed by flowering shrubs and creepers in the bungalow gardens: brilliant purple and cherry-red bougainvilleas, morning glories blue as a clear sky, the deep, pure, primary orange of bignonias. People were streaming in on bicycles, carrying fruits, vegetables and flowers to the market. One man had his carrier loaded with superb Madonna lilies, like those I'd bought on my first day. We passed a knot of European lads in running shorts and pants pounding along beside the tarmac highway. My companions made some ribald remarks in their own language and laughed to see so much energy uselessly expended. It did look rather silly, I suppose.

Further on, among the cultivated hillsides boys were herding cattle which I first thought were goats, they were so small and skinny. Many of these people, so near the city, seem scarcely to have changed at all. I suppose it often happens that the peasant takes little notice of the townsman. I remember being told of a Belgic settlement within a few miles of a Roman city in Gloucestershire where no trace had been found of any Roman influence, not even pots or coins.

James observed, "It is the way we lived for many centuries and we have got used to it. A certain amount of obstinacy is needed to survive."

On top of the escarpment we stopped to drink very sweet tea from a thermos. What a view! It's as if you were in the prow of a gigantic ship looking down over an infinite ocean, stilled by some titanic stroke, that shimmers and glitters in perpetual sunlight. Extinct volcanoes stand up like coral atolls from this wide, wide petrified sea. Over the surface of this great expanse of sage-green and silver-grey roll purple shadows of the clouds that pace the sky like mighty tortoises in silent cavalcade. No life to be seen below—no towns, houses, people. This vast landscape, with its heat-pulsating air, dwarfs men to insignificance, and now there's not even game any more. What a sight it must have been when the floor of this valley crawled with hartebeeste, zebra, gazelle, wildebeeste, giraffe; and when these craggy mountains, clothed with a silvery bush they call *leleshwa*, were the haunt of buffaloes. All gone—swallowed up by the Moloch of Progress with its precision rifles and barbed wire. James has brought his secretary, Elizabeth. The old-fashioned word "demure" best describes her; she's quiet, self-possessed, outwardly prim and speaks only when spoken to, and not much then. You feel this to be a crust only, like an Eskimo pie in reverse—a layer of ice over a rich, exotic and far from icy middle. She has a lively, strong, sculptured figure, high-

breasted, and wears a yellow silk blouse and a skirt (rather tight) with a vivid red-and-black flower pattern. Her hair's close-cropped and woolly. So far I've got no distance in conversation.

The road twists and turns down the face of the escarpment between rocks and boulders, with trees and bushes clinging on for dear life where they can, past a compact and charming little church put up by the Italian prisoners-of-war, and then threads on through an immense valley, past extinct volcano craters and lakes that look as hard and blue as beads, past tall, red-barked acacias and brown, cropped veld-grass, past straggling dusty Indian villages with roofs shining like pools of water, flat and squat as if anchored to the ground. A good tarmac road, enabling us to reach our destination round about breakfast time.

Nakuru is a busy, glaring little town full of cars—a miniature Nairobi, with the same jumble of dark Indian shops and light, white, more imposing modern ones. A jumble of shops too: white women selling curios and lampshades as in Bognor Regis, Indians offering zebra-hide slippers and handbags, and piles of gaily printed materials; luscious displays of strawberries, cheeses and hams, and shopwindows full of brightly painted farm implements. There's a big signpost in the centre of the town with Cape Town 3,697 miles on it, Cairo 2,812 miles—and a lamppost from Waterloo Bridge.

We turned off the main road into a jungle of streets in the African quarter. Here again is the same odd mixture: the square, tin-roofed huts built by Africans to suit their own needs, with separate kitchens at the back and a yard to make a muddle in; and the stone-built, red-tiled neat little bungalows built by the municipality, each with its patch of garden. There are even flats, the latest fashion, dumped down like pepper pots, one two three, no grouping; still, they look up-to-date and their occupants take pride in them. These are

rented by Indians mainly, but a few prosperous African tenants have moved in. It was the occupant of one of these that we'd come to find.

"Perhaps he will be sitting on a committee," James remarked. "You know, we grow committees here as we grow potatoes. If you dig one up you'll find a lot of little committees clinging on underneath."

"It's a pity you can't eat committees," the businessman said, and laughed. He's always laughing, whereas the town councillor seldom even smiles. What has brought the three of them together? Friendship? Business? What *is* James's business in Kampala? Something legal, I suppose; he's given no hint.

Our potential host was out: so James was told by a good-looking young woman who wore her hair in many tight ringlets and was swathed in brightly printed cotton cloth. She invited us in, but I sensed that I was an obstacle and told James that I would fend for myself. He insisted on driving me to one of the hotels of the town. I invited him in but he looked at me pityingly and said:

"You have a lot to learn, Andrew. Don't you know that you stand before the holy of holies, the sacred temple of white supremacy? And that no one who's an African and therefore owns the soil on which the building stands is invited into it?"

"But surely—" I began, sure that he exaggerated.

James laughed and laid a hand on my arm. "Don't worry, you'll get used to it. If a dirty old farmer who lives like a pig and abuses his servants and has done time for fraud comes here, he is welcome; his friends may not be very proud of him, but think of the thousands of years of Christian civilization he's inherited! Whereas I, who have the honour of belonging to the Inner Temple, have no Christian civilization so I don't think I'd be made welcome if I went in.

Never mind, Andrew, you'll get a good meal, though not a very cheap one. Christian civilization is rather an expensive thing."

He left me angry and upset but dubious: I'm told they've done away with all that nonsense in hotels, and wonder if he wasn't rather piling on the agony. Understandably, of course. So, being very hungry, I went in and had a good meal. Afterwards I sat on the veranda and watched the people in the street: the slow, padding, half-asleep walk of sauntering Africans, the brisk, sharp stride of a European woman with her shopping bag, the drilled pace of a pair of police askaris in long blue jerseys with leather shoulder-pads. Cars and lorries passed, their tires singing on the tarmac: everything seemed purposeful. I felt out of things, alone and deflated, and wished that I had a sympathetic companion.

Two young women in bright cotton frocks sat next to me and gossiped: at least, one was young, plump and rather squat, not a glamorous type but capable and good-natured. The other, in early middle age, had a face that seemed vaguely familiar though I couldn't place it: dark, lean, humorous, intelligent. The plump one did most of the talking. She was a nurse, their conversation was medical except for an interval when they discussed a friend called Moira who'd married a soldier. They were waiting for someone called Dougal to collect them and take them by car out to the country.

I kept my eyes on my book and so, when I heard my name spoken, I started, and looked up straight into the face of Dougal Kennedy.

We exchanged the usual surprised and hearty greetings, the fancy-running-into-you and how-small-the-world-is, and agreed that nearly fifteen years had passed since we'd met. We'd both been lads just out of school then, with little in common beyond our age and the accident of having been

brought up in the same part of Argyll. I hadn't even known that he was in Africa. Only a faint trace of the Scots has stayed on his tongue, he's hardened and solidified and changed inside as well as out: now he's confident and, as it were, expanded. Secure.

He was the missing man expected by the two women. The familiar look about the older one's face was soon explained. She's his sister, and a doctor. The other's a nurse who's going out to their place for the week-end.

Dougal asked me to spend the night on his farm about twenty miles out, and of course I accepted. A lucky break for me.

Dougal's place has great charm and no frills. He's built it up—is doing so—bit by bit without a great splash of capital. When he wants a new building he gets a rough mason to cut stone from a quarry and builds it, often with his own hands. The machinery's a ramshackle lot of stuff but he's a good mechanic and keeps it all working somehow. He never buys anything if he can make or borrow it. His sister pulls his leg about a closeness in which he takes the usual Scots pride.

"There's a famous story about Dougal," Morna Kennedy said. "One of his boys stole a pair of socks and disappeared. Dougal got on to a mule and went after him. He rode two hundred miles and caught the boy and brought the socks back."

"It was a new pair of socks," Dougal commented.

When I told him of my project he was very interested. Dougal has a great admiration for the work Clausen did for the wretched devils taken prisoner by the Japs in World War II. Clausen was in charge of the dietetic side of their repatriation. "He saved thousands of us," Dougal said. "If it hadn't

been for him, we'd have been given a blowout of stew-and-potatoes and plum duff and that would have finished most of us off, after three years of roots and rice water."

Clausen drew up the transitional diets, organized rehabilitation camps and saw to it that the right food and medicines were available, a tremendous task in the chaotic conditions of the time. He dropped all his own work for this and, later, to help direct the resettlement of displaced persons from Central Europe. It was about this time that the decisive change came over his mind, turning him from a brilliant scientist first into an almost desperate toiler in humanitarian causes, then into a recluse, the recluse of LuaLa, a thinker and philosopher.

"Talking of LuaLa, an interesting man came down from there a while ago," Morna Kennedy said. "An African doctor, his name was Roland, he spoke French. I know it's silly to find it strange when Africans talk beautiful French. We had an international conference on nutrition and he read a first-rate paper on protein absorption which was one of the high spots of the whole show."

Morna Kennedy admired his ability but didn't like him much personally—"too clever by half." (Professional—or racial—jealousy?)

"But Smack thinks a lot of him, evidently," she added.

"Smack?"

"Yes. He's one of their star turns."

She looked at me with amazement when I asked her to explain Smack. "I thought everyone had heard of it. But then, you don't know Africa, do you?" (This always seems to be regarded as a sign of abnormality by those who do.)

Smack, she explained, is spelt SMAC—the Société Métallurgique d'Afrique Centrale. It's one of those big international cartels with ramifications all over the world, red rags to every honest socialist bull. It owns a lot of mines in

Africa, railways, diamond fields, trading firms, everything you can think of. An octopus. Dr. Roland is their leading research worker on nutrition and now it's on the cards that they may build laboratories for these investigations at Luala, of all places. Poor Clausen! What an irony if his hermit's retreat becomes a scientific metropolis!

We had a cosy, domesticated evening. Dougal sent the houseboy away and the two women cooked supper—very good. They said they liked to keep their hands in. Dougal, I think, is quietly putting the plump young nurse, Eileen, through her paces. He's a calculating devil. He "does" his cattle well and his labour well—"It pays to keep them contented"—and I expect he'll treat a wife the same way. And it will be a happy marriage, probably. She may even laugh at his practical jokes. After we'd gone to bed, shrieks came from the rondavel the two women were sharing and Eileen dashed out shouting for Dougal. "Snake, snake!" Commotion. We seized sticks and advanced into the hut. Dougal pushed Eileen into the room first, insisting that it would be good practice for her. She was terrified. At last she prodded the snake and it just lay there. Dougal roared with laughter, and picked it up by the tail. It was a dead one he'd planted for a "joke."

That drove away my sleepiness and so I went for a moonlight walk. The shadows were sharp as if cut with a knife, the trees as solid and tenebrous as the pelt of some great black bear, and everywhere I felt a sense of something lying in wait. The air smelt of earth and wood fires and stirred with the queer, muted noises that always come at night.

I paused by a little stream, dark as wine, but silver where it spurted over the rocks. The close-fisted bush brooded over it like a jailor. Beyond lay the dark forest and a company of silver-headed maize plants standing to attention on the verges, tirelessly conversing in dry-throated ghostly whispers



as the spent breeze, no stronger than a nightjar's call, went softly by. I crossed the stream and walked into the forest, which closed around me like a blanket; and then something quite invisible, intangible, yet absolutely real and purposeful seemed to rise up and halt me in my tracks. I tried to step forward, but my legs were stuck like a fly's on sticky paper, I could hardly have dragged them on if there'd been a leopard at my heels. I had a strange, compulsive conviction that someone in the darkness was ordering me back, some power stronger than I, and I actually did retreat a few steps. "No farther," this power was commanding me, "thus far and no farther. Go back, back, back!" And retreat I did, using all my self-control not to run.

What, why, how? I've had this sort of feeling before and I have always obeyed it. Is it a human will, somehow engaging mine in the unknown space-time that surrounds us? Or some supernatural force, some fate or god or spirit? It's easy enough, in a wild country, to slip into the belief that spirits dwell in tree and rock and river and occupy a hidden world that intermingles with our own. And at such times and places our narrow little faith in reason and order seems about as substantial as an eggshell afloat upon an angry sea.

Trivial as it may have been, this experience has made me restless, and anxious to get back to find James. I have a feeling something's gone wrong—either that James will go on without me, or that the whole expedition will fade away. This morning Dougal reinforced my fears.

"I don't care if those pals of yours are barristers or prime ministers or kings of Ethiopia," he said. "They're all the same. Conceited as peacocks and no time-sense. Probably they'll start next week or not at all, or in the wrong direction. They'll all find women in Nakuru and go on a blind. Where d'you want to get to? Kampala? Just leave it to me."

He wasn't far out, damn him. When I ran James to earth

in Nakuru it was plain as a pylon that he had the king of hang-overs and wasn't in any state to take the road. "Business," he said, would keep him in Nakuru for "a few days." He was evasive when I tried to pin him down to a firm date.

"It looks as if I'll have to make my own arrangements," I said rather sulkily.

James gave a wan smile. "You think I've let you down, Andrew. But I really have business here. And we didn't settle any particular day for reaching Kampala. Do you think we have all turned into trains, which have to obey a timetable printed in a book?"

"I can't afford to hang about Nakuru."

"Do your friends make you pay for their hospitality?"

"Of course not! But . . ."

He had me, in argument. Am I just being foolishly impatient, like an oat-fed horse? Or is he being foolishly indolent and time-wasting? Which ever it is, we can't change. I said I'd make my way, if I could, independently. He shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Just as you wish, Andrew. But remember the tortoise and the hare!" We parted amicably. Drink is James's weakness; I only hope it won't spoil his career. I felt sorry, all the same, to think that I may never see him again.

This morning I was woken early by an extraordinary sound, a scratchy sort of wheezing or screeching that jerked me out of my slumbers. The sunlight struck in through an unglazed window frame on to whitewashed walls and a concrete floor strewn with the skins of various animals. No frills in the bedroom, just a camp bed, furniture made out of packing cases, an enamel washbasin. A wonderful fresh earthy morning smell with tang of wood smoke in it drenched the

air, birds outside were singing fit to burst, and a creeper with an orange flower pushed its tendrils in through the window.

I'm staying with Mrs. Ogilbie, a friend of the Kennedys. Yesterday a couple called Rance, who came down to Nakuru to fetch their son from hospital, gave me a lift as far as Eldoret, which is on the road to Kampala.

"You don't want to stay at the pub," Dougal advised, appreciating my financial position. "Ma Ogilbie will put you up."

"But I don't know her," I protested.

"She'll always take in a friend of mine," Dougal replied. "She's one of the old school. Came up here in an ox wagon or something. People used to drop in on their way to Uganda before the railway was built. She got used to odd lots turning up." So he arranged it by telephone. And here I am.

Gradually it dawned on me that the caterwauling which had woken me was "Onward, Christian Soldiers" played on a veteran gramophone, the kind with a large trumpet. A short interval, then "We plough the fields and scatter." Next a youth in shorts entered with a delicious cup of tea and a banana. Luxury! But not for long. A commotion outside: stampings and snortings, yelpings and whines, and words of command in stentorian voices: "Get down, damn ye." "Stand still, you bloody little fool." Mrs. Ogilbie was abroad. Sunday morning: first hymns (with tea), then to horse and away.

Once, long ago, jackals and various kinds of antelope were pursued, but now they've all gone and the hunt's reduced to a drag. Every Sunday morning at the right time of year—tradition doesn't sanction even a drag in the breeding season—an African goes off on his bicycle before dawn dragging a hunk of rotten meat, and about an hour later Mrs. Ogilbie follows with her hounds and a selection of neighbours.

I'd much rather have slept but I reckon Mrs. Ogilbie would have hauled me out of bed herself if I'd tried. She's a

very forceful lady of seventy-odd years who wears old-fashioned riding skirts of khaki drill divided down the middle, and screws her hair into a bun. She has a fascinating brown face like a carving, almost a gargoyle, but it stops just short of the grotesque. Her nose is beaky, her mouth can shut like a safe door, she's leathery and lined and has the bluest eyes I've ever seen.

A white pony, fat and obstinate, was found for me, and Mrs. Ogilbie settled me on to it, with some impatience at my incompetence.

"Tame business, this," she said in strong, masculine tones. "Never knew what you'd flush in the old days—jack, eland, rhino, buff. Once we hunted what we thought was a reed-buck into a *donga* and it turned out to be a lion. That's the skin in the sitting room. After breakfast the bishop held a confirmation service, we had a polo tournament in the afternoon and got in three sets of tennis after tea. Not a bad day, eh? But nowadays . . ." She frowned, checked my girths again and rode off to discipline the hounds, a mixed lot, full of clumsy, elephantine good humour.

It must have seemed tame to her—no lions or buffaloes, a lot of wheat fields and wattle plantations—but it terrified me. I'd hoped that my fat pony would refuse to co-operate, but I might have known better, he wouldn't have stayed in Mrs. Ogilbie's stable if he had. I shook about for a bit like a potato on a griddle and eventually came off at a post-and-rails, giving one arm and shoulder a nasty scrape. Luckily, the pony consented to let me scramble on it again and then took me quietly back to the farm.

When Mrs. Ogilbie returned, fresh as a daisy, she insisted upon dabbing my scratches with a strong solution of permanganate of potash which stung like the devil, and I felt like a small boy at school who didn't dare to flinch—though flinch I did, and she soothed me as people soothe horses,

talking in a special voice and once even whistling through her teeth.

"That's nothing," she said. "Yesterday I had a *bibi* who'd scalded the whole of one side with boiling water and then let it go bad; she was festering all over. And then there was a boy who tried to make an earring by beating out a detonator. He blew off one hand and most of the side of his face. These few scratches—" She dabbed them again, decisively.

Then came the hunt breakfast—a ritual feast held on the veranda every Sunday in the "hunting season." Anyone who wants to may come. Platters of bacon-and-eggs, sausages, kidneys and ham appeared. Mrs. Ogilbie lives well but in a pretty squalid muddle, everything lies about, from old copies of the *Illustrated London News* to garden tools and socks in need of darning—I even came across an ostrich-feather fan. Living room and veranda are full of the remains of dead animals: horns of various shapes and sizes on the walls, skins on floor and couch, a walking-stick stand made from an elephant's foot, an inkstand from the same part of a buffalo, several paper knives (hardly much in use?) mounted on the feet of antelopes. There are several cases of stuffed birds. (Not well stuffed, they're disintegrating.) To sit down, you generally have to evict a dog, which leaves a warm patch and, I expect, a parcel of fleas. Cigarette tins containing paraffin, half-filled with dead ticks, are strewn about, and whenever Mrs. Ogilbie sits down, her hands feel for ticks in the coats of the numerous dogs which immediately surround her.

About halfway through breakfast, a girl came in who looked about as fitted to the surroundings as a Sèvres teacup to an army canteen. Down to her red sandals and varnished toenails, her red swirling skirt and white sweater, she was dressed as if for a day on the beach. Her face wasn't of the type I admire, too dark and self-possessed, with an underlying hint of discontent, even of ferocity, about it. Perhaps

that's imagination; she's good-looking enough; I think unhappy; her smile seemed mechanical. She has that strange quality of making herself felt. One can't overlook her presence or put her quite out of one's mind so long as she's there. Her name is Gemma Kreiss.

"Mrs. Ogilbie has more or less adopted her," my neighbour said. "Just like the old war horse. She's always collecting lame ducks."

"Is Miss Kreiss a lame duck?"

The man laughed. "If she is, I daresay there's plenty of people ready to help her over a style."

I had no chance to speak to her today, beyond exchanging a few polite words. After breakfast the neighbours gradually dispersed and she went off with a party to sail on one of the nearby dams. Later on, I remarked to Mrs. Ogilbie that she seemed an unusual sort of girl to find in these parts.

"Unusual! Why?"

"She seems—it's difficult to explain—perhaps I mean metropolitan."

"She wears a lot of silly clothes and puts a lot of muck on her face and nails, if that's what you mean. But I don't think that's unusual—I wish it was."

"What's her history?"

Mrs. Ogilbie looked at me and her leathery face creased all over with lines. She had more than ever the appearance of a gargoyle, quite a benevolent one.

"You're not the first young man who's asked questions about Gemma. I don't see so much of her now. Her mother had a job in Eldoret, she and her husband were separated. Gemma's father had some minor position on the railway and Gemma got into the habit of coming here. In fact this place became her second home—I suppose it's her only home now."

"I can't imagine a nicer one."

"Tommyrot! Perhaps it's a question of any port in a

storm. Gemma's had a few storms in her life, short as it's been. Well, I daresay they've taught her to swim."

I got no more out of Mrs. Ogilbie on that subject, though I learnt that Gemma Kreiss had worked as a secretary in various places, the last being Kampala, where her boss had been a Dr. Kaplan, one of the university staff.

Tonight I almost wish I wasn't going on to Lua-la. This is such a friendly, easygoing spot—for the first time since I left Cape Town I feel at home, almost settled. The road to Lua-la is the unknown, and I've a premonition it won't be easy.

Stupid! What could I do here? I've less than twenty pounds in my pocket and no ballast but ideas. If I surrender them I'm stripped bare. On, then, towards Lua-la: but how? That's the point.

This afternoon, finding Gemma Kreiss on the veranda, I put this question to her. She replied:

"Why don't you go by train? We do have them, you know."

"I'm trying to save money. In fact, I've very little to save."

"You must have had some to get into the country. Didn't they make you put down a hundred pounds?"

"They didn't make me do anything. I came in from Tanganyika in a native lorry."

"You must be an illegal immigrant, then."

"Very likely. The question is how to be an emigrant, now."

"If anyone finds out, you'll be in trouble."

This hadn't occurred to me, but I suppose I have dodged the law. All the more reason for getting on quickly.

Gemma Kreiss said: "I'd better speak to Ma Ogilbie about you. After all, you're a friend of Dougal Kennedy's, so I suppose you must be respectable."

Her tone nettled me. "I shouldn't like to saddle him with any sort of guarantee. I hadn't seen him for fifteen years when I ran into him in Nakuru."

"That's true. How did you pick up with those Africans of yours?"

"I used to know James Gichini in London."

"I suppose he was an agitator."

"He was a nationalist. Aren't we all?"

"A Communist, very likely."

"I don't think so, but I don't know."

"Queer company you keep."

"It all depends what you mean by queer. I could retort—" But I broke off and added, "We're almost quarrelling and there doesn't seem to be any point. Tell me something about Kampala."

I could scarcely have been less interested in Kampala at the moment, but it seemed noncontroversial.

"It's an unplanned garden city that thinks it's the centre of the universe, and everyone distrusts everyone else. In other words, much like any other place except for the climate, which is perfect for the first six months and after that, boring."

She sounded disillusioned, or worse, discontented: silly, in a girl of her looks. Yet there's something behind it, the grit of unhappiness; her movements, her remarks are too controlled. She's acting a part, I suppose.

And then she has the darkest eyes I've ever seen, and the brightest. A bit shortsighted? They're curiously expressionless. That's an illusion too—the notion that we "read" in people's eyes emotions, thoughts, passions. "The window of the soul"—bunk. Eyes are in fact a collection of photosensitive rods. They register, they don't react. The rest is all a novelist's trick.





Gemma has spoken to Ma Ogilbie, who came up and said: "I can get you a job that will take you as far as Butiaba, if that's on your way."

It is indeed: it's on Lake Albert, the point of departure for steamers going down the Nile. A stroke of luck!

"You won't get paid anything," she added quickly, "but you'll get your expenses and a free ride."

A cattle dealer called Brayne is sending a lorry-load of animals to the Belgian Congo. He gets them to Butiaba, where the buyer takes delivery and arranges transport across the lake. He has an African driver who ran into trouble on the last occasion and he wants a European to take charge. It'll suit me a treat. The distance is between three and four hundred miles, and we start the day after tomorrow.

"I've come across some people with pretty queer notions in my time," Mrs. Ogilbie said. "But this idea of sitting at the feet of a half-baked old crackpot—a foreigner at that—who thinks he's solved the riddle of the universe by going to ground in some godforsaken corner of the Congo—that beats the lot. Who's going to read about it if you *do* find him? What good does it do?"

I tried to defend myself, unsuccessfully. She strode off (we sat on the veranda over teacups) and touched, as she passed, with a brown clawlike hand, a glossy magazine Gemma had left on the table. "I've heard they cut down whole forests to make trash like this. They'd do better if they left the trees."

Gemma laughed, rather snarkily, and looked at me: "You won't get much support from Ma Ogilbie for your intellectual pursuits."

I ignored that, and asked more about her life in Kampala. The Dr. Kaplan she worked for is director of the School of Advanced Studies at the University College. She's left—she

didn't say why—and is now on holiday, but is trying for a job in the Belgian Congo.

"It'll be a plum if I can land it," she said. "Secretary to the director of an octopus called SMAC."

That's the big Anglo-Belgo-American combine that Morna Kennedy told me about. She added:

"I probably shan't get the job. There'll be dozens after it and I don't suppose my French is good enough."

It must be pretty good, or she wouldn't have reached the short list, I observed.

"My father spoke it as his mother-tongue. But then I didn't see much of him after I was little."

When I wanted to find out more she put up a barrier, indefinable but rigid. Perhaps not a barrier so much as a zone of evasion; I had only to advance into it for her to dodge away. Once she looked at me and said, "You're on the run, aren't you? Is it personal, or so to speak public—the police or something?"

I laughed at that, but it made me uneasy.

She added, "Ma Ogilbie thinks you're a Communist."

"Because I came up here with James Gichini?"

"There doesn't seem to be any *reason* for your being here at all."

"Ewart Clausen . . ."

"Oh, she thinks that's a tall story. I don't suppose she's heard of him anyway."

"But you have."

"Yes, of course." She hesitated. "Do you really think he's such a great man?"

"The nearest approach we have to one, anyway."

"It seems a long way to go to look for a subject to write about."

"Not if the subject's as big as I believe it to be."

"I hope you won't be disillusioned."

Everyone seems to worry about my disillusionment, it's getting monotonous. I asked, "What do they think of him at your School of Advanced Studies?"

"Not much—he's a professional rival and a blackleg. They're angling for new buildings for which they want a million pounds and he says you only need a teacher with something to say, pupils who want to learn and a shady tree. You can't expect them to endorse *that*."

"It's certainly a subversive doctrine. But I doubt whether Clausen will be able to maintain it much longer. Not if your SMAC turns Luala into a centre of research on nutrition, or something."

"For the great Dr. Roland," Gemma said pensively.

"Have you come across him?"

"He came down to Kampala not long ago, and we had him around the school for several days."

"He sounds a clever chap."

"Yes—very clever, very hard, very ruthless, very down-to-earth I'd say, a mind like a crystal. The sort of man who knows what he wants and goes straight to the point. He seemed so un-African. I think he's dangerous."

"To whom?"

"Oh, anyone who gets in his way, I suppose. It's just a quality he has, like romanticism or impulsiveness."

"But is he romantic or impulsive? He doesn't sound . . ."

Gemma laughed. "No, you are." Her laugh was unexpected, almost a chuckle, and did something to neutralize the sting. Then we heard Mrs. Ogilbie calling; it was five o'clock and she'd arranged to take us to admire birds on one of the dams.

These reed-fringed dams are magnets drawing water fowl for hundreds of miles: Egyptian geese, teal and pochard, pintail and shoveler; superb creatures, I could watch them circle and settle, take off and swoop and bank, for hours on end.

But the light died quickly and by six-thirty it was almost dark. Just before the sun went down it drenched the undulating hills behind us, and the wide plain ahead, with a light as golden as the heart of a tulip or sunshine filtered through a daffodil, but a thousand times more deep and concentrated. You could see motes of dust swimming like tiny fishes in a vast golden sea, you felt as if the world hung on the brink of some great revelation. I was spellbound. Mrs. Ogilbie cursed the midges and talked to the dogs, whom she prefers to people.

I stood by Gemma on the dam's edge with the squawk of ducks, the whistle of a flight of circling teal and the pinging of mosquitoes in our ears and with all this ebullient glory in our eyes, and I wanted only to put out a hand and touch her bare arm, itself touched with gold in this astounding light. But I didn't. More than anything, I didn't want to get involved. I've had enough involvement for a lifetime and Clausen, this whole expedition, is in a sense an antidote. If I get my fingers burnt again I shall be the bloodiest fool alive.

Thank God I'm leaving tomorrow morning. Only idiots try to make earrings out of detonators. Yet I wish I had one more day.

Dusk was closing in as we ran into Kampala, a place of trees and greenery with a mild, soft, beguiling air. Here's another Indian town, its low and sprawling streets have about them that curious hint of oriental origin. Brown men in black caps or white turbans stand by their *dukas* or parade the streets. The Africans look larger and fatter and dress differently: the men wear, with dignity, the *kanzu* (that flowing white nightshirt) and a jacket; the women are magnificent in cottons printed in every colour under the sun. A broad

sash gathers in the skirt and bodice around their sturdy middles; they look proud and matronly and walk like queens.

In the half-light, with lamps shining from the open-fronted *dukas* and a smell of hot earth and spices in the air, the place has an exotic, exciting atmosphere. Here you are a world away from the cool upland openness of Kenya, here the air feels confined and there's an emanation of age, of knowledge, of lushness, of ancient fears and wrongs, almost of disillusion. Buganda is an ancient kingdom, Kampala the site of many cruelties, the soil of the hill called Mengo soaked in blood; this one knows, and one's knowledge, reflected like light from a mirror, returns to the mind in the guise of an impression, a sense of atmosphere. I think there's no such thing as objectivity among travellers, except perhaps among the totally ignorant. I like Kampala, its air is balmy, its trees are green, its colours gay, its people dignified.

Our destination was a lairage outside the town which the authorities maintain for transient livestock. We found in charge an African who spoke good English and had an air of rather self-satisfied authority. The cattle must have been thankful to get out of the hot, bumpy lorry. They looked pretty dazed and miserable but were all right except for one which seemed to have bruised or strained a leg. I saw they had plenty of water, arranged for hay, signed several forms and announced that we were to start at six o'clock next morning. This annoyed Otiano, the driver, who evidently liked Kampala at least as well as I do and had looked forward to a longer stay. He was sulky, and I knew that I could whistle for him at the lairage at six next morning. He's a big, strapping fellow who wears his hat at a rakish angle and, according to Brayne, has a weakness for smoking bhang. Brayne warned me to keep him off it somehow or other. "If you don't, you might have a murder on your hands."

I told him there'd be a ten-shilling bonus if we got to

Butiaba by four o'clock. That seemed to sweeten him; he set his hat at an even jauntier angle and went off with a wave of the hand.

I wondered if I dared ring up Dr. Kaplan, as Gemma had urged me to; I hate trying to explain myself to total strangers and didn't want to cadge a bed. After a lot of hesitation, I did so, and was invited around at once; Dr. Kaplan even said he'd come to the hotel to pilot me to his house. I just had time to get into my one decent suit.

He proved to be a big, sallow-skinned man with those dark, moist, sapient eyes which seem to hold some sad and ancient message that can never be told. His voice was harsh and loud, his personality gritty, like sandpaper, his smile professional; but he was kind and affable, and not too startled when I pointed out to him my five-ton cattle truck. He merely remarked that I must find it expensive to run and piloted me out to a house on a hill overlooking the town, a modern flat-roofed house of plate-glass and concrete, full of air and light. Mrs. Kaplan wore a kind of sari, though she's not an Indian—quite the reverse, a peaky blonde who (I should say) has married, intellectually, above her station.

"Mr. Colquhoun's a modern nomad," Kaplan said. "He travels with a herd of cattle." Mrs. Kaplan glanced with apprehension at the door, thinking no doubt of her petunias, and Kaplan added reassuringly, "A mechanized nomad."

A number of young African students sat about the room drinking coffee. I had interrupted a seminar or gathering of some kind. Several smiled politely; they evidently looked on Kaplan as a kind of amiable performing seal and were glad to see him catch a fish now and then.

"These gentlemen smile," Kaplan said. "They're anach-

ronisms, though they don't know it. They believe in democracy and nationalism, in elected legislatures and universal suffrage and sovereign states, all that. Long before they're dead the world will be governed by a few physicists who turn knobs and pull switches. Never before will so many have been ruled by so few. They want to be democrats—it's technocrats they ought to become. All the gods they worship are dead."

"Dr. Kaplan likes to joke with us," one of the young men said tolerantly.

"All revolutionary movements look like jokes to the unperceptive. The Romans slapped their thighs over the slaves in the catacombs. Suffragettes raised laughs in every music hall. You'll see."

The purpose of my journey soon came out, and everyone talked about Clausen. Kaplan said that Clausen was trying to create a legend, to present himself to the world as a modern hero, using the word in its classical sense. Of course, he said, we need legends and heroes, they are perhaps our greatest need today, but Clausen had made the mistake of turning to the past and trying to relive the legend of the desert father, the prophet in the wilderness, the lonely student of eternal verities. "You can't repeat yourself and get away with it," he said. "Elijah, Isaiah, Moses, Solon, Diogenes, St. Anthony, St. Augustine—they're all there and all as dead as mutton anyway. It's the new legend and the new hero we must create."

I said I didn't think that Clausen had the least intention of creating a legend, that he was merely trying to discover a little more of the truth about living, just as in his career as a biologist he'd discovered a little more of the truth about life. Kaplan would have none of this.

"It's Clausen who's off the rails because he's trying to go backwards. The simple life on nuts, herbs and spring water

in a homespun tunic, teaching a grass-roots philosophy under a tree—stuff and nonsense. All the real truths about the universe are being teased out in the big laboratories among the cyclotrons and nuclear-splitting rays, or in observatories with giant telescopes and light-recording photocells. The thinker with his mind alone is now as useless as the fighter with his hands alone against a guided missile. Someone's got to modernize the great world religions in terms the modern man can understand. The new son of God won't be a carpenter but a physicist and he'll discover not how to break the atom but how to make it. The new oracle will be an electronic brain, the new heaven will be found in the space-time continuum. Good heavens, even our symbols are a thousand years out of date! The good shepherd tending his flock—when most people have never seen a sheep, and shepherds went out when the combine-harvester came in! The new saviour will be a shop-steward protecting his union members from exploitation, and the devil a scab, not a chap with horns."

Perhaps because I was tired and hungry, Kaplan irritated me: he was talking for effect, to *épater* the intellectual bourgeois. I defended Clausen pretty well, considering the state of my stomach, and several of the students took my side. I was surprised to find that they knew all about him, and in what respect he was held. One of them even suggested that he was divinely inspired.

"You haven't read what he's written," Kaplan maintained. "Clausen's a pagan, not a Christian. At heart, he's a believer in magic, not in prayer."

"I do not agree," the student said firmly. He was clearly wounded, and I thought Kaplan unkind. Then the student came over and sat beside me, bringing a plate of sandwiches.

"I think you are hungry," he said. "No one will mind if you eat these."

"Did I make it very obvious?"



He laughed. "No, but I could see you wanted more from the way you looked at them." I was touched that he should have noticed, and taken the trouble to help me, a stranger.

"Dr. Kaplan is often humorous," he remarked, "He pulls our legs. I would like to ask you a question."

I told him to go ahead.

"It's about Dr. Clausen. I think he is a very great man. He has no hatred for anyone and he wishes only to help others. But he is a European. Why does he live in Africa and not in Europe? Why doesn't he stay to help his own people? And—one more question please—why does he go to such a distant place where it is difficult to see him? He is like a man exiled by his king. But no king wishes to exile Dr. Clausen. That is something I cannot understand."

I said that I would try to answer those questions after I had seen Clausen, not before, but I thought it was because Africa still had big areas in it, and many people, who'd remained primitive, and lived a simpler life than we live in Europe with our cities and industries. In such places he could escape from the pressure of daily life and feel himself more closely in tune with the rhythms of nature, and more closely in touch with people who've retained much of the instinctive understanding of the natural world that we have sacrificed in our struggle to master it.

"But life among our people is not simple," the student protested. "That is something Europeans will not believe. It is the European life which is simple."

"It doesn't seem so to us," I said.

He continued, "Look at the people in this room. We are students, we meet here on equal terms, we call each other George or Harry, or by our African names. We eat together and no one takes offence. But that would not be so in an African household. You see that man over there?" He pointed to one of the students who was drinking coffee by

the door. "He is the son of an important chief and one of the royal clan. If he spoke to me—I mean, supposing we were not educated—I should have to fall down on my face, and to go on my knees if he walked by. In the past, he could have had me killed by a wave of his hand. That man over there belongs to the clan of the smiths. Its members are feared for the curses they can lay on people and I would not eat with him or touch him, it would be wrong, and I could not marry into his family. There's a fellow over there who's a slave, at least his ancestors were; I would not let him touch me, and he would use a special greeting if I addressed him."

"But you speak of the past," I said.

"Yes, it's past, but it is not forgotten. The family of that girl in the corner has a feud with the family of the man who is talking to Dr. Kaplan; her uncles burnt alive his grandfather and all his family several years ago. One of those uncles was drowned in his canoe last year. Some say it was witchcraft. Perhaps it was truly an accident, but that girl and that man would not care to eat together in one another's household. I do not understand why you say life is simple here. It is less simple, and that is why all our people wish for education, to leave these difficulties behind them in their villages and live as one family."

This was a point of view that hadn't previously struck me. Family life with us is very meagre by African standards, and anything that's meagre is simple: with them, it's rich, deep, complex. They think us unnatural, to feel no involvement in the lives of cousins and uncles and brothers-in-law, to have no claim on them, and no responsibility.

"Perhaps marriage is simpler with you," I suggested. "At any rate you don't seem to make a mess of it so often."

The student smiled—a little smugly. "That is not because it is simpler. I think the opposite: with us, the whole family

must agree, both families. With you, it is just the man and the woman."

"Perhaps, then, Dr. Clausen came to live in Africa," I suggested, "to learn these things from you."

"Europeans do not come for that. They come to teach."

I couldn't make out whether his tone held a touch of irony.

He added, "I would like to meet Dr. Clausen. We had a lecture about him the other day by someone who had been to see him. An African doctor, his name was Roland."

"I've heard of Dr. Roland. I should like to meet him."

"Dr. Roland is a man of action," the student said. Then Mrs. Kaplan came up and invited me to stay the night. At first I refused, as I wanted to be with the cattle, but I'm afraid my resistance was overcome without much of a struggle. The party went on till about eleven, by which time I was very sleepy and had eaten a lot of sandwiches.

I tried to discover something about Gemma. "The best secretary I've ever had," Kaplan told me. Beyond that he was vague. "She's a local girl. Self-possessed, intelligent, temperamental. I don't know much about her background. Her father was in the railway, they moved about a good deal." I said it was a wonder she hadn't married before now. "There's some history," Kaplan said, "about that. I don't think it's a very happy one but you mustn't ask me details, I don't know them for one thing and I leave gossip to the women for another."

Mrs. Kaplan would have liked to gossip but, with her husband there, only remarked primly: "She was badly treated but it's all forgotten now. The sins of the fathers . . ."

Kaplan choked her off and I was left with a piqued curiosity, but too tired to let it worry me. And I'm not going to let Gemma worry me in any case. Any infection can be cured if you catch it in time.

It's proving much easier to get *into* places than away from them. Kampala was no exception.

First of all, as I'd expected, Otiano didn't turn up at the lairage. Then that pipsqueak of a veterinary inspector, as he proved to be, refused to clear the cattle on the grounds that he suspected some wholly imaginary disease. Of course he wanted money. This aroused all my Scots obstinacy and I took myself off to the offices of his superiors to complain. Nothing doing!

"I shouldn't worry, old boy," said a fat, red-faced man in shorts with red knees. "Sometimes our fellows may get a bit overzealous. It's a fault on the right side and we mustn't keep interfering. Your cattle will be well looked after and if they're all right they'll be released when the time comes."

So that was that. Full of frustrated wrath, I went to find the brother-in-law of Hirji, the Indian I'd worked with in Nairobi. I showed him Hirji's photograph and that worked like a charm.

"You must give that man one hundred shillings," this Indian said, shrugging his shoulders. All my pay! And I suppose my other objections just didn't make sense to Hirji's relative. I gave him the money and left him to arrange things—I couldn't have brought myself to be civil to that "inspector."

And then, when the cattle were fixed, I still had to find the driver. Even the Indian couldn't help me there. I had to wait at the lairage, fretting and fuming, until four in the afternoon when Otiano and his mate at last turned up, bleary-eyed and sulky and much the worse for wear. I needed every bit of self-control not to let fly.

I didn't trust his driving and so I took it over myself and drove all night over unknown roads to try to make the connection, struggling with a leaden sleepiness to which Otiano noisily succumbed. I reached Butiaba soon after daybreak to

find the Belgian buyer on the point of leaving. He'd given us up and the boat was due to sail within the hour. We got the cattle on board by the skin of our teeth, and I said good-bye to Otiano with no regrets on either side.

On board the S.S. *General Gordon*, leaning over the rail to watch freight being stowed, was a figure I couldn't fail to recognize. James Gichini! With him was Elizabeth. I could scarcely believe my eyes.

He seemed amused at my astonishment, and said, "All roads lead to Rome, they say—but where's Rome? That's the question. As a matter of fact I am taking a short holiday. I have never been to this part of Africa, I have never seen the Nile, I have never seen an elephant. Isn't it time that I put these matters right?"

"You didn't say anything about this in Nairobi."

"For the good reason that I hadn't thought about it. I got to Kampala and then Elizabeth said, 'What is beyond Kampala?' And I said, 'Uganda.' And she asked, 'And what is beyond Uganda?' So I replied, 'The maps say there is the Belgian Congo, the Nile, the Sudan, the Sahara, all sorts of things.' And Elizabeth said, 'Well, shouldn't we find out?' So we came."

Elizabeth was standing next to him and smiled as much as to say: he will have his little joke. I wondered what was behind all this. If he'd intended all along to make this trip, why hadn't he told me? If he'd decided on the spur of the moment, what was the true reason? I asked how far he was going.

"That all depends. I have a ticket to Juba. If I don't like the Nile and the elephants, perhaps I shall turn home sooner."

"And if you do like them will you go on?"

"To Lua!a? To see the great Dr. Clausen you admire so much?"

"Perhaps. Or to Cairo to see the Pyramids."

James laughed as if I had made a great joke. "The Pyramids are very large and famous but what is at the bottom of them? A grave. No, I don't want to see gravestones, even big ones. I'd rather see your Dr. Clausen, who's alive."

People poured aboard the *General Gordon* until I thought she'd be submerged by sheer weight of numbers. People with goats and live chickens, with bundles and boxes, people in tattered shorts and bright cotton dresses and smart drill suits, children and babies and bicycles, loads of maize, big heavy bunches of bananas, cassava roots and sticks of sugar cane, empty kerosene tins, cases of beer, young men in dark glasses and tilted hats, an askari going on leave with his boots under his arm. All sorts, all ages and kinds, all cheerful and smiling, plenty of shouting and laughter and noise.

Lake Albert—marvellously blue, the mountains seem to rise out of the water and give it the look of a Highland loch; but the sun blazes, even the wooden rail burns to the touch. We steamed, it appeared, straight towards the shore, which was dotted with stubby trees, and then an opening received us, a most unobtrusive outlet, and in a very short while we were chugging between two green banks fringed with palm trees. This is the Albert Nile. No wonder it wasn't discovered until Baker traced it in 1864. The White Nile flows into the lake a few miles from where the Albert Nile flows out.

Now and again we stopped at a little waterside halt, as remote and isolated as a stage on the route to the world's end. A few tin-roofed huts, a tiny jetty, a board with a name on it, that's all. No sign of life or cultivation along the riverbanks, yet at each halt a cluster of people waited to get on or off.

The men had astonishing hairdos; their matted manes, treated with fat, clay and cow dung, were moulded into high crests like cocks, into plates, plumes, horns, boats, all sorts of shapes; one youth looked as if he had on a fireman's helmet. Most of them, men and women, were stark naked. Sensible, one would think, in this punishing heat, yet Arabs wrap up against it in yards and yards of *burnous*. The women had long, floppy breasts and wide hips and were not at all seductive.

James contemplated them from the rail as if they'd been zoological specimens.

"Now we can see what Eve looked like," he remarked, "before she ate the forbidden fruit. But don't you think she must have been disappointed? After defying God and eating such a very important apple, all she found out was to despise her body. I should have expected to learn something more interesting."

I don't know when or where we entered the Sudan. Beyond a fringe of trees and vegetation along the banks the country is brown, flat, cracked and aquiver with heat which lies like a weight on your shoulders. We saw the elephants, browsing quietly a hundred yards away. They scarcely moved their great umbrella ears to look at us; like the weird sister, they munched, and munched, and munched.

The captain, a leathery old Scot named McKay, lent me his glasses and pointed out that two or three of the elephants had stumpy tails. It's a favourite pastime of the local warriors, he said, to stalk these elephants, close up, seize the tail, slice off the end with a sword and bear it away as a trophy for their girls. Most of these people, he added, are little touched by education and still primitive. In theory they are self-governing—which means, of course, that they are governed by Arabs from Khartoum who are hand in glove with the Egyptians. Cairo (he said) is reaching out here as it did before the

days of Baker and Gordon when all this country was a reservoir of slaves, and the grandfathers of people waiting at the little halts were hunted like animals and taken down the river in chains.

"The papers keep quiet about it," he said, "but this country's full of trouble. These fellows can't stand the Arabs and they never will. Not surprising, when you think that Arabs and Egyptians have been raiding here for slaves for thousands of years. You don't forget that in half a century and say, 'It's all right, those boys have had a change of heart.' It made me sick, to see us bundled out by the Arabs leaving these people to their fate—handing them over in spite of all their protests like a pound of tea. We broke our word to them. Well! That's democracy, I suppose, and I'm out of date. But I'll tell you this."

He looked down the river which was growing grey as mercury, for dusk was falling, the sad twilight, and the great expanse of barren scrub that stretched away on either side was fading like an unfixed photograph, getting blurred and shadowy and frighteningly illimitable, and filling with the mystery of the dark.

"There's more trouble coming from down there," and he pointed ahead. "From two thousand miles down there, from Cairo. That's where it starts, and it's reaching up here, up to Uganda, up to the Congo where you're going, like a stain of oil. The Cairo people want all this, they want Africa, and they want us out, as we've cleared out of the Sudan. And they'll go to any lengths to do it. And they'll do it soon. I see and hear things on this river and I see them come and go. You look out for yourself, Mr. Colquhoun. You keep some queer company."

I was startled. "Do you mean James? He's all right, what's wrong with him? He's a nationalist, of course; they all are. So are you and so am I. It's natural to want freedom."



"Ay, freedom. And what sort of freedom is it going to be for those fellows out there"—He waved a hand towards the darkening plains where the Dinka and Shilluk presumably tended their herds, standing on one leg like a stalk, spear in hand—"and for all the other millions of poor black devils who cultivate their crops, just on the right side of famine, when these fellows in Cairo take the upper hand? This James of yours, what sort of freedom does he want—freedom for his fellow-countrymen to pull themselves up a little from their poverty and savagery, or freedom for himself to be the boss-man and line his nest with nice downy feathers? And what's he doing here anyway on this river, going to Juba of all places? What d'you suppose he wants there?"

I realized that McKay had got on to his hobbyhorse, the hobbyhorse so many people here seem to ride, like Tantrum with his Asian Menace. This time it's the sinister influence of Cairo, the pan-African plot. So I said soothingly that James was having a holiday, as anyone might. McKay snorted at me.

"You're not so soft as to believe that!"

Perhaps I am naïve. But then it's no business of mine, I've no concern in politics. I said as much, and that my sole interest was in Clausen and his biography.

"He's a fine old man, from all I've heard," McKay agreed. "He's got a great name with the natives, even down in Uganda. It's not many white men that have these days. But he's on the losing side."

"He doesn't take sides."

"He's on the side of tolerance and good will. Well, that's losing ground every day, in these regions. I tell you, we're seeing history go backwards like a film put into reverse. Soon we shall look up and say, 'This is where I came in.'"

An old pessimist. Of course it's hard for the men whose day is over to adjust themselves to the new outlook. It's all

happened so suddenly. And of course it's true that for years the propaganda machine in Cairo has been working up race-hatred virulently. That's inevitable, until the nationalist dream is fulfilled.

And, after all, we're interlopers in this immense desert and plain with its bush-dotted gullies, its trodden cattle paths, its arid harshness, the bitter struggle for existence waged by every thornbush, every water-storing bulb, every food-questing bird and preyed-on insect. We couldn't live here as these lean brown tribesmen do, following the herds, surviving on a few handfuls of millet and a cupful of rancid whey. This river isn't our river with our history lodged in every yard of bank. The Pharaoh's men came up here, beyond Nubia, five thousand years ago, to capture slaves; and down it flows the life of Egypt, and at its source lies the heart of the dark races' land.

We're interlopers, and our stay may be a short one, but we shall be survived by our ideas, which already have cracked the mould of Africa and let in new forces, new patterns, to mingle with the old. Little wonder the times aren't comfortable, but there's no reason for old McKay's despair.

Things are working out remarkably: so much so that I can't help wondering whether it's mere coincidence or something else—some sort of unseen design.

We reached Juba. I had no idea at all of how I could proceed. I knew that roads of a sort run west to the cotton-growing centres, and northwest to the Bahr-el-Ghazal. There are no railways, bus services or other means of public transport. But even in the Bahr-el-Ghazal, much of which is flooded in the rains, there are small administrative posts and little trading centres and somehow they must be supplied. So

there must be lorries. And from Juba to the French frontier can't be, as the crow flies, more than about four hundred miles.

For the southern Sudan, Juba's quite a big place, with rows of corrugated iron-roofed clay huts and straight streets fringed by sad, dispirited trees. Thin red dust, imperfectly bound by the tough creeping roots of desert grasses whose leaves are the colour of hay, drifts over and into everything. The place feels as if it had been soaked for a thousand years in undiluted heat until all life and change had been suspended, like a specimen preserved in alcohol. And there, lacking all grandeur of cliff or valley, is the smooth-flowing glassy Nile, with boats moving up and down.

I went for a walk, and watched night fall, and prowled about the streets, wondering why people live at Juba, what they do or hope to do; and when I got back, there was James in the bar with a tall, spare, Arab-looking man in spectacles. He had the light bronze skin and sharp nose of the northerner, but fuzzy Negro hair and those dark, obscure Negro eyes, screened by spectacles tinted against the Sudanese glare. I was struck with his appearance; he looked alert, intelligent, sensitive. Two deep lines ran down on each side of his nose to the corners of a thin-lipped mouth. He wore a fresh white suit, moved gracefully, and had long thin hands and fingers on which he wore two big rings. The timbre of his voice was rather high, but pleasant, he was talking English to James with a slight French accent, which (illogically) sounded odd.

James beckoned to me with a proprietary air.

"I have some good news for you. Perhaps you have heard of Dr. Roland, he is a very famous man. People know his name in Paris, in London, even in New York. This is Dr. Roland here, and he is going tomorrow to Luala, or to somewhere quite close. Perhaps if you can make friends with him he will take you in his car."

We shook hands and exchanged polite greetings.

"You must not expect a comfortable journey," Dr. Roland said. "The roads are very poor and progress is like that of the snail. No, perhaps not the snail, which has a gliding motion; the flea rather, we hop from boulder to boulder."

I said that he was very kind, and offered him a drink, but he declined. "I go to many conferences and it's best not to start or there would be no finishing. I've come now from a medical conference in Cairo, so if you care to join me on my return trip to Lua-la . . ." He bowed in a Gallic manner; nothing could have been more friendly and courteous. Of course, I accepted. Then he turned to James.

"Why not come too, and see another country? There's room, I take a lorry as well as a car."

"Thank you," said James, "I would like to, but I have Elizabeth, and I have also my work. I must return to Nairobi."

"There's room for Elizabeth, and won't the work wait? It's good for everyone to take a holiday."

James declined, without much fervour; Dr. Roland pressed; in the end James accepted. A queer coincidence. Or is it? Has all this been prearranged? I've really no reason to think that. Dr. Roland obviously goes often to conferences, and where more likely than to Cairo? And James—James seemed to have come to Juba casually, without previous intent. And yet . . .

Still, there it is, and if they did meet here by design it's none of my business. It merely suits my book very well. We start tomorrow. In two or three days' time I should be in Lua-la, and with infinitely less trouble and expense than ever I anticipated.



We started early in a splendid new Buick whose seats are equipped with dust covers that can be taken out and washed, and we travelled in style, chauffeur-driven, tailed by a lorry full of camp kit and stores. I am now the guest of SMAC. They do things handsomely, and Dr. Roland is a prince of the establishment.

We proceeded first across black-cotton soil that now, in the dry season, has deep cracks everywhere; in the rains it's morass, impassable. The country's not as flat as it looks. It's scoured with little *wadis* (dry river-beds), full of boulders and sand, which have to be negotiated with caution. Thorn trees grow along them and in between there's veld-grass and scattered little thornbushes, now bare and dry. Farther north lie the marshy swamps of the Bahr-el-Ghazal whose people live on fish and hippo meat. We passed some big herds of small humped cattle, each enveloped in a cloud of dust and attended by tall, thin, stalklike men, with proud falcon faces, who carry long spears. One or two wore loincloths, the others were naked as Adam, and splendidly built.

James was subdued today—quite outshone by Roland, who's so obviously a man of finer calibre. Elizabeth sat silently with the efficient driver, who speaks no English but a little French, and has tribal scar-marks cicatrized across his face.

It was hot, glaring, dusty; we bumped endlessly on, stopping once for welcome tea from thermoses. This bare, monotonous, treeless country seemed to continue until the end of the world. Now and then low ranges of hill appeared, clothed on top with dark bush and scarred with gullies. We saw game: the elephant gazelle, the high-shouldered hartebeeste, the loping giraffe, and other beasts; elephant and rhino are both common. The road was just a track which sometimes divided into several tracks and sometimes, to my eyes, vanished altogether, but the driver always managed to

retrieve it. In the afternoon we climbed one of the rocky ranges and could see others opening up beyond and quivering with heat-haze in the distance. The Sudanese desert lay behind us now, the country became more wooded and the grass less tufty, not quite so scorched and sporadic and brown. Small, scruffy-looking trees appeared, some with blood-red blossoms and no leaves.

"The watershed of Nile and Congo," Dr. Roland said, waving towards the tumbled, jagged, comfortless hills ahead. "Tomorrow we shall see rivers that flow and are not merely threads of sand."

At about four o'clock we reached a little trading post: a few open-fronted stores, some shacks, and a circle of round, whitewashed thatched huts with a flagpole and a barbed-wire fence. Once this had been a police post but it was now deserted, and flew no flag. "They have concentrated the police into district headquarters," Dr. Roland said.

We went on about half a mile to a hilltop where some tidy-looking huts stood amid a circle of trees: a resthouse built for the convenience of district officers on tour. It, too, had a barren flagpole standing on a neglected lawn. Dr. Roland's efficient SMAC servants unloaded beds, bedding, tables, camp chairs, cooking utensils. One of the two sleeping huts was given to me. I protested, and indeed I'd have preferred to have slept out under the stars, but Dr. Roland was so courteously insistent I was afraid I would offend him if I refused. So I had the hut, and Dr. Roland's bed was put up on the veranda of the living hut. From it, for the first time, we had a glimpse of immensity: blue, uneven, cloud-shadowed mountains to the northwest and, to the south and east, great unending sun-sodden plains rolling down to the Nile. And not a human habitation in sight. Not a hut, not a soul.

We drank brandy after sundown and Dr. Roland told us a bit about SMAC. It has its international fingers in a score

of pies—uranium in the Belgian Congo, aluminum in Canada, tungsten in South Africa, copper, lead and tin in Central Africa, many other things. Probably Roland himself doesn't know half of them. His job is the health of the African workers, numbering thirty thousand in French territory alone, but he's concerned with research, not with ordinary dieting and hygiene. The firm spends millions of francs, and takes immense trouble, to improve the health not only of its workers but of all their families. "The research that I do is for the benefit of everyone," Roland said. "Nothing is kept a secret for the company." He is proud of his organization and of the work he is doing. And it's true, SMAC is to build new laboratories near Lua-la. Why Lua-la? I asked. It was chosen for its remoteness by Clausen, and remote it surely is.

"But Dr. Clausen has killed that remoteness," Roland said. "He found an unknown place, and he has made it famous. People come to it like pilgrims—as you do. It is hard to get there still, but so many people are anxious to do so that the airlines talk of making a landing ground. And now my company is to give him money for experiments in education, and so still more people will come. From a scientific point of view, it has certain advantages. The native tribes around there still live as they have always done, they are true *indigènes*, and we shall be able to study their health and nutrition. And so Lua-la will become famous, a good road will be made, one day you will be able to take a ticket on a bus."

I'm glad I shall get there just in time, before it becomes like any other place.

I asked Dr. Roland his opinion of Clausen as a scientist.

"He is one of the greatest scientists alive. Anyone will tell you that. His early work on cytology was the foundation of the research that has since revealed the nature of cell struc-

ture. He has looked into the heart of the mysteries of life."

Roland spoke with unmistakable sincerity.

"Besides," he added, "Dr. Clausen is a man of character. He has some quality of sympathy—of understanding—of goodness of heart—I don't quite know how to express it. When you meet him you will feel that he is charged with a superior force, like a magnet, and you will see at Lua-la how people come to him like iron filings, drawn by this force they don't understand."

"As a scientist," I asked, "can you explain that?"

He made an impatient gesture. "Science is measurement. The immeasurable will always remain."

It's interesting that Clausen exerts such influence over men like Roland who, I suspect, under his sophisticated surface, is prickly as a hedgehog. Something in Clausen's character seems to appeal to a layer of consciousness below brain and reason, in the region of the instincts and emotions which still rule all human beings most of the time.

SMAC's cook served us an excellent *kibab* with plenty of rice, and afterwards we talked. Roland is well-informed, easy, quick, civilized—quite unlike James who, for all his intelligence and fluency, seldom looks beyond his own small world of friends, career and politics. I should doubt if, nowadays, he ever reads a book for pleasure. But Roland ranges widely and can forget politics. A curious character. He takes snuff and carries a fascinating little gilt-and-enamel snuffbox which he saw me admiring. He handed it over, remarking that it was a replica of one made by Fabergé for a Grand Duke of Russia. Inside the lid there had been skilfully fitted the portrait of a man. Roland smiled when he saw me looking at it and remarked:



"Sometimes I like to be reminded that an obscure peasant from a backward country can rise by his own achievements to command emperors and change the history of the world. There is the greatest of all Europeans."

I held it to the light of our paraffin lamp and recognized the hawklike features of the young Napoleon Bonaparte.

"The greatest of imperialists," I suggested.

"He conquered to liberate. Some men are great in their ideas—perhaps we can mention Clausen there; some are great in their actions; it's when the two fuse together that we can recognize an undisputed grandeur. When profound ideas are expressed in momentous action, then you have your truly great men. These have been few, but here's their paragon."

I asked if he would put any living men into that class.

"Two, perhaps—your Churchill, India's Nehru. In the last generation, Gandhi and Lenin."

"But no African?"

"Not yet." He smiled as he took back the snuffbox, and asked, "Do you think that I should hide this dangerous *penchant*, like Julian Sorel, who concealed Napoleon's portrait under his mattress?"

"Perhaps you'll be safe now that he's been dead for more than a century."

"Ah, but then ideas are like trees, you strike a cutting and the old sap rises on new roots and the tree blooms again."

It's rare for a man of his stamp to indulge even in mild self-mockery. He has a curiously formal, precise mode of speech—he thinks in French, I suppose—and intimidates me by his erudition. He put away the snuffbox and talked about Napoleon with an animation that removed all the solemnity from a face that, at certain moments, puts me in mind of a Barbary pirate—and, indeed, one such might well figure in his ancestry. There's nothing superficial about his store of Napoleonic information. (It was poetic licence, not igno-

rance, that led him to describe the Corsican as a peasant.) He's studied the Egyptian campaign *in situ* (the defeat of the Mamelukes outside Cairo he described as "the first step in the liberation of Egypt") and exuded enthusiasm—overidealistic, surely—about the campaigns in northern Italy. It was odd, and shows my insularity, to hear Waterloo spoken of not as a triumph but as a tragedy. Odd, too, to hear the most blatant of aggressors and ruthless of imperialists extolled by a man of African blood in these days when the mildest imperialist is the blackest of villains. But then it's always foolish to look for consistency.

All the time we were talking, Roland's thin hands and long fingers (a musician's or a surgeon's hands?) were busy with a penknife and a stick he'd cut from the bush during the day, a length of thorn just right for a walking stick. He was carving the crooked end into some shape or other. After a discourse on the battle of Aboukir he held it up, completed, and there was the head of a gerenuk, that queer giraffe-necked antelope that inhabits the dry lands. A perfect little carving: nose lifted, ears pricked, delicate features suggested by a few simple lines, the whole thing instinct with life and movement. A many-sided man! When I expressed my admiration he was pleased, and handed me the stick.

"I should be glad if you would keep it as a souvenir," he said formally. I accepted with pleasure. He gave a quick little half-smile which I think meant, in his own heart: one day you'll be proud to acknowledge this as the gift of Dr. Roland, the first African to express profound ideas in momentous action.

After our evening's talk I went to sleep at once, as usual, but then, unusually, woke up suddenly. My watch said twelve-fifteen. I lay still, listening. The silence was not a real silence at all, but a symphony of small, irregular, hinted noises: the far-off croaking of frogs, a distant dog barking, or

was it a jackal? I could recognize those, but what were the whispers, rustles, soft grunts and stealthy little sounds that might have been footfalls, or deep breaths drawn in the darkness? A whole world was now in action out there under the stars, a world with its own rules and characters, of which I knew nothing at all.

And then I was certain there *was* a footfall, an object moving just beyond the door; and I heard the door itself (a rough, homemade job) open as gently as it could be opened, and I could feel, if not hear, a presence standing there.

I reached for the flashlight under my pillow, sat up and shone it full at the door.

The figure stood motionless, one hand on the knob. Then the eyes blinked against the light. It was the last person I'd expected to see. I said, rather inanely, "What's the matter? Is anything wrong?"

It was Elizabeth. Slowly, deliberately, she closed the door and walked across the hut till she stood beside me, and only then said, in her stilted English, "May I come in?"

I could only repeat my questions. She sat down on the bed.

"I am alone," she said. Her voice was liquid, gentle, and had in it the unmistakable accent of invitation.

"Where's James?" She shrugged her shoulders and made a gesture with her hands.

The thing baffled me completely. I could feel her weight against my legs, she was pressing against them and had rested one hand on my knee. This was all very well, Elizabeth was an agreeable young woman and seemed at any moment about to hop into my bed, but where (to repeat myself) was James?

"He has gone," she said, with a distinct accent of impatience. "I do not like to be alone." So she was angry with James, and I was to be her revenge.

To her surprise and, I fear, annoyance, I jumped out of

bed and put on the old mac which serves me for dressing gown, overcoat, blanket or pillow.

"We're going to find James."

I could feel her anger growing in the darkness. What did I want with James? she said; and then a lot of words came tumbling out. He had taken her on this trip against her will. Why did he drive forever and forever away from home into all these wild places with strangers not of their tribe or habit? She was afraid he was going to abandon her to all the dangers of the unknown. He listened not to her any more but to this man Roland, who was neither a white man nor a black man but a dangerous mixture who would bring only harm to James, to her, to everyone. "He is like the chameleon," she said, "you beware, he is your enemy." She wanted to go back to her own people, her own home.

All this I had to piece together; her English is fumbling and she didn't know the words for half of what she tried to convey. But there wasn't much doubt as to her meaning. Her meaning—her outward meaning. Was all this true, or was it something she's been put up to, or was it a ruse to entangle me in order to get her own back on James?

I took her arm and almost dragged her from the hut. It was dark outside. The hut she shared with James was empty and so was Dr. Roland's bed on the veranda. And the car was gone.

I told her to go back to her own bed, and added that I'd wait up for their return. She started to abuse me. Luckily I couldn't understand the names she called me, but their import was quite plain. I had to hang on to my self-control, telling myself that this had all the makings of a trap—though why James should want to set a trap for me and bait it with Elizabeth, God knows. Anyway I made up my mind not to get entangled and to keep my temper and I just managed it. I couldn't lock my door so I put on my shoes and went for a

walk in the dark, hoping that I might run into some clue to James's and Roland's whereabouts and purposes. I walked hard for half an hour, stumbling over boulders and catching my feet in tufts of grass and trying to puzzle out, over and over again, this and other mysteries that seem to thicken as we approach Lua-la. One thing is certain: it was no coincidence that brought James and Roland together at Juba. They had some business here, some purpose, some plan.

I turned back. Far away, in the hills that lie between our camp and Lua-la, I saw a light twinkle, a light that seemed to move. Yet it's hard to tell, at such a distance, when a light really moves or when it just appears to do so. It might have been the headlights of a car. Or it might not.

I fell asleep in spite of everything, and didn't hear the car return. When I awoke the sun was streaming down, the dew was fresh, doves were calling and I saw Dr. Roland outside talking with good humour to a tall man whom I took to be a local official of some kind. His greeting was cheerful, so was James's, and neither said a word about any nocturnal expedition.

There was a hitch, however, when the time came to continue our journey. The car wouldn't start.

"That's queer," I said. "It was going perfectly last night." I stressed the last two words and watched Roland's face, but he betrayed nothing.

"I expect the driver will get it going before long," he said.

The driver wrestled until the sun grew hot overhead and then he sat down in the shade and wiped his face and gave up. I suggested to Roland that we should travel in the truck.

"I'd rather keep together if we can," Roland decided. "The driver wouldn't like to be left alone, he's a Brazzaville man. We'll stay here tonight and he must try again; if he fails, then we shall have to do as you say."

Another night excursion! This time, I meant to watch.

With that in mind I went to lie down, around noon, to rest, but failed to sleep, so I got up soon after one o'clock thinking a stroll would do me good. It was blindingly hot, and more silent now than by night: insects, birds, beasts, people, everything drowsily slumbered in the heat of the day. I walked around to the back of the resthouse to see what the driver was up to, feeling the short, stubbly, harsh grass of what had been a lawn crunch under my feet.

The car had gone.

I walked through the open doors of the resthouse, in at one and out at the other: nobody. The door of James's hut was closed. All this made me angry, this cheating and pretence; they were treating me as if I didn't exist; probably every one of the servants and hangers-on knew what was happening but I was kept in the dark. Thinking, all right, I'll damned well find out, I set off down the hill and into the village, or post, or whatever it was called—a godforsaken place in all conscience, with its deserted police huts, its dusty bit of road, its three or four ramshackle tin-roofed huts. But it had at least one sewing machine. A young man was treadling away outside one of the huts under a roughly constructed shelter made of four poles and some thatch.

I made a noise like a car (I hoped) and pointed my inquiry. The man laughed heartily, and pointed back the way I'd come. So back I trudged, uphill this time, and soon I was dripping with sweat and began to think myself a fool: but I was resolved not to be a cipher. Beyond the camp, a track led on towards the distant hills. God, it was hot! And dry: the air parched one's skin. Only spiky trees with small, tight leaves can live in this climate, everything prickles and defends. The wiry grass felt springy underfoot, only insects stirred and they scuttled everywhere: beetles, ants, grasshoppers, flies. Now and again a horny lizard with an orange tail darted across the path into the protection of a boulder. Vast

as it is, empty, barren, boundless, you feel this landscape to be full of secret life, and life that's as prickly as the trees, life aggressive and inimical.

A track seems very different when you drive along it and when you footslog in the sun. It wound about all over the place, climbing into the hills. Bushes, thorn trees, boulders, ridges, everything swam in the heat. With every step the country grew more immense and the walker more insignificant, a tiny speck on the earth's crust, of no more consequence than a fugitive ant.

I walked for two hours. By that time the sun was halfway down the sky and the air held a hint of relief from its punishment. Still no sign of anything, and I knew that I must turn for home. As the track had wound in such a serpentine fashion up and down the ridges, it was obvious that I could save half the distance by taking a direct line across country. I'd kept the camp's position fixed in relation to several landmarks, so I turned back and left the track to find my own way.

It was soon borne in upon me that this wasn't as easy as it had looked. The bush was thicker than I'd expected and I had to keep making detours. The ground was slippery, the thorns very savage and I scratched my legs and arms. The grass, burnt and bleached like standing hay, wrapped itself around my legs and rattled as I thrust ahead. I crossed one or two dry river-beds and came out on top of a ridge to see ahead of me, and slightly below, a belt of thicker bush, almost forest, with a lot of taller, greener trees. At last, a river-bed with water in it! I pressed on eagerly, for I was parched with thirst, reflecting at the same time that belts of bush with water in them were just the place for rhino, buffalo, elephant and other dangerous beasts.

Then I heard a sound. A gusty, uneven sound—some kind of animal? It stopped, and I continued towards it, for it

seemed to come from in or beyond the belt of trees. I had no weapon and I felt very much alone and naked in this enormous continent with no protection, no companion, no friends.

The sound started again—louder now, almost like the distant roar of water and indescribably melancholy, something in sorrow or in pain. It rose and fell, rose and fell rhythmically, and fetched the goose-pimples up on my skin. Something in the pitch of it reached into my innards and made me weak at the knees. Now I'd come to the trees and found myself suddenly in deep shade, and this added to my feeling of dread and expectancy. It was just as if unseen and hostile eyes surrounded me. So oppressive did this sensation become that I stood still for a while, with a mouth as dry as a peach-stone, unable to force myself forward. The rhythmic, gushing sound rose and fell.

It needed a terrific effort to approach but I had to make it, and now the trees became friends. They thinned out, and in a little while I could see glimpses before me of water and reeds. The strange pulsating sound grew louder. And then I stood on the edge of the open country and could see before me one end of a small lake and, beyond that, half-hidden by the reeds, a concourse of people, a dark blot upon the livid scene, a mass of dusky faces, bodies, limbs, of skins that gleamed like polished metal and seemed to hold and almost to reflect the sun. They had gathered around the margin of the lake and were praying, or making incantations, or in some cause uniting their voices in a supplication or hymn. A small group of men stood waist-deep in the water among the reeds, and one seemed to be holding a star in his hand. It winked at me: I was astounded, and only slowly came to realize that he held nothing more eccentric than a knife with a long blade. And, like the chanting, it rose and fell. In the



reeds, some life or other reached its end, but I was too far to see the stained water or to hear cries.

When I moved cautiously to get a clearer view, the sun again winked back at me, but with more force: it was bouncing off the shiny body of a car drawn up close to the reeds. Dr. Roland's car. This made me recoil deeper into the shadow, while at the same time I said to myself: you should go forward and greet him, he'll have some explanation for all this. But I didn't go.

After I'd been there for perhaps ten minutes, I began to panic about my return. The sun suddenly seemed much lower, and I had two hours' walk before me, over unknown terrain. So I moved away cautiously, all the time in fear lest guards might have been posted at some distance from the ceremony, whatever it was, and a spear be thrown before the challenge, to save argument.

I came at last to the river-bed below the lake; it was marshy, I got my feet covered with black mud, but I couldn't find a drinking pool and, thirsty as I was, didn't wait to search, the sun was falling with such a frightening speed. Everything tried to hold me back—thorns, slippery grass, bush that had to be skirted, fatigue. All the time my memory held the picture of the copper-coloured crowd by the reedy lake, the waist-deep officiators, the star winking in the wader's hand. And the rhythm of a verse I hadn't thought of for years unexpectedly drummed in my head.

The red rock wilderness  
Shall be my dwelling place. . . .

When the sun's heat slackens, these landscapes come to life like a waking sleeper; doves call in the acacias; francolins cry; a troop of plump, blue-headed guinea fowl bobbed along in front of me; a pair of antelopes stood stiffly like statues of

alertness and then vanished with a single spring. There was movement, awareness, life. I alone was played out. I trudged on with the sloping sun for my guide, the verse now throbbing in my head.

The seven branched cactus  
Will never sweat wine:  
My own bleeding feet  
Shall furnish the sign.

The rock says "Endure."  
The wind says "Pursue."  
The sun says "I will suck your bones  
And afterward bury you."

Alone in such circumstances, you feel the vast, the utter indifference of time and place like an iron fist squeezing your heart, and it's one of the most frightening sensations in the world. You could fall and die, the vultures and the ants would strip your bones and everything that was you, a human personality, would vanish off the face of the uncaring earth.

The red rock wilderness  
Shall be my dwelling place. . . .

The sun reached the horizon, paused, swiftly descended. For some time I'd been growing apprehensive; by now I should have seen the resthouses, in fact by now I should have reached shelter and safety. Many ridges had raised my hopes but I'd seen no flagpole, no roof. The earth's heat was dying and a chill had come already into the air. The shadows had gone, the short-lived violet dusk descended and I was alone.

I was heading for the summit of a low, round hill ahead of me from which I hoped that I could gain a longer view, and with the little energy I could now summon I put on a spurt to reach it before the light failed. I did reach it, and stood panting, hopefully peering—nothing. Nothing still but bush, bush, ridge and *wadi*, miles without end. The rock I sat on still held a little of the heat of the sun but soon it would grow cold as death, when the dew came down. I was burning all over and my throat was like sandpaper, and I'd have given my life's blood for a long, long drink.

The best thing to do, I decided, was to light a fire and sit by it and hope that if I was searched for, it would be seen; if not, it would keep me warm, discourage roaming beasts and anchor me to the spot. The great thing was not to panic and go roving around and around. So I gathered up a heap of twigs and branches as quickly as I could, realizing with dismay what a lot I should need and cursing myself for the stupid impetuous idiocy of plunging like this into the bush without rifle or water bottle—elementary needs. "The red rock wilderness shall be my dwelling place"—this looked all too likely; I could only hope and curse and feed the fire, and watch a million stars prick out overhead, and hear the bullfrog chorus open suddenly from the swamps behind me as if someone had turned it on with a switch.

The fire became insatiable, and gave me no rest, and my thirst became almost unendurable. I had to use all my resolution not to leave the fire and stumble off into the darkness in a vain search for water—anything to assuage the torment of thirst. How long this went on for I don't know. I'd almost given up hope when I heard a distant shout from the darkness and in a few moments a light came waving through the bush. There was the driver, and with him a couple of others from the camp. My fire had done its work. I was rescued, and safe

—only half a mile from the track and perhaps two miles from the resthouse, which was hidden from me by a single ridge. Yet one could be lost as completely within a mile of help as one could be in the heart of the Sahara. One could die almost within sight of camp.

Dr. Roland and James greeted me effusively, with every sign of welcoming a long-lost friend, and Roland prescribed a drink for me with salt in it, in case I got miner's cramp. They peppered me with questions—what I'd done, where I'd been. And then they took the wind out of my sails.

"I thought you were asleep, or I'd have invited you to come with us," Roland said. "The driver managed to repair the car and, as we'd heard about a native ceremony that was being held nearby, we went out to look for it."

"And you found it," I said.

"Yes, we did; it was by a lake, they were sacrificing a sheep in the water to bring rain. Or so they said, I think; our driver speaks a little of the dialect, but not much. I think it was for rain, but there may have been some other reason. Some native superstition, at any rate."

He sounded faintly contemptuous, very much the superior European not especially interested in savage customs.

"I wish I'd seen it," I said.

"It would have made a good photograph," Roland agreed dryly. "You shouldn't wander off by yourself in that way; it isn't safe; there are many snakes and wild animals. How should we explain your absence if you disappeared?"

It was on the tip of my tongue to answer: How would anyone know if I disappeared? But a chill in the heart suddenly froze the words. They were true—too true. And yet—what a ridiculous feeling! Roland is a senior member of the staff of one of the great world-ramifying international combines, James a member of the Inner Temple; I am travelling

with friends. Thoughts like that show only how these harsh and empty wastes, the cruel sun, the loneliness, can infect one's mind with the spores of unjustified suspicion.

At last—Luala. It seems incredible that I've actually arrived.

After we left the rest-camp, the country gradually changed. We climbed, it grew more hilly, less dry, the grass stood higher and the trees grew more luxuriantly. At times the track faded away and I thought we were lost, it was bumpy beyond words, but somehow the driver found his way. No wonder we carried spare springs. We came once on a heap of fresh elephant droppings. They were steaming, the beasts couldn't have been more than a mile or two away. They might well have been only a few yards, and we all peered anxiously around every bush, but we saw nothing larger than a herd of red impala leaping like ballet dancers as they sprang out of the way. The only sign of human life was a couple of Africans walking along in blankets, carrying spears. They, too, were going to Luala and they climbed gratefully into the lorry, arranging their blankets around their scrawny legs with grunts of satisfaction. Charms and snuff-horns were hung around their necks on chains of fine workmanship, and they wore sandals made of old motor tires.

As we continued, the river-beds—streamlet-beds perhaps one should say—became more frequent and at last we saw flowing water, the first we'd come to since the Nile. It was only a trickle but it moved. Later, we came to real streams. Dense vegetation (full of tsetse flies, Roland said) covered the banks and we splashed with some anxiety across the shallow fords. These streams ultimately join the system of the Congo, not the Nile. And then we came upon the first cultivation

we had seen since Juba, small, dry-soiled clearings in the bush planted with millet or beans. One had the feeling of approaching some kind of centre, if only a cluster of huts and a store selling paraffin and blankets: even that, in these parts, makes a township and draws people into its orbit like a tiny sun.

Then, suddenly, we were in Luala: a row of three or four open-fronted stores, each with its narrow veranda, one of these harbouring the inevitable sewing-machine treadler. But there was more than this, there was a post office and a telegraph wire slung between new-looking poles, one or two of which were sprouting greenery.

"Civilization is coming to Luala," Roland said. "In a few years, perhaps it will become a real town." His tone was quite paternal. "But as I don't think you would find the present accommodation suitable, I can offer you a room in my company's resthouse until you settle where to go."

Work has not yet started on the laboratories, but SMAC has built a resthouse for the senior staff who will be supervising their erection. Roland doesn't live at Luala, though he comes here fairly often to keep an eye on things. His headquarters are in Stanleyville in the Belgian Congo, about five hundred miles to the southwest. The SMAC resthouse is about three miles beyond Luala "village" (these European terms don't really fit) and within a mile or two of Clausen's place, and my goal. So I was glad to accept his offer.

A mile beyond the "village" is a permanent river, the Luala, spanned by a rough log bridge, the first bridge I've seen since leaving Uganda. On the far side, the road becomes a much more serious affair which leads to the district headquarters and, beyond that, to Stanleyville. We crossed the river and climbed steeply for two miles in low gear to emerge on to a sort of open plain or natural clearing; beyond lay a range of forest-covered hills. From this plateau we could

see down over Lua-la to the broken country we had travelled through, blackened by bush as by a huge stain of oil. The sun was beginning to sink behind the hills of the Congo in the opposite direction, throwing mile-long shadows and dropping a golden light into the still air. It's a place of great beauty—no, beauty isn't the word. It's all too rough-hewn and elemental to be called beautiful. Grandeur is a nearer word.

The resthouse stands on a little rise and has newly planted trees around it, each in a small cage. It has a flagpole—every resthouse seems to have that. A white-coated steward who speaks excellent French is in charge. One feels immediately that one has touched a tentacle of efficiency, of the new and streamlined world that is creeping into Africa. That night we enjoyed a first-class meal, the best I've had for ages, with fresh fish and roast lamb; the SMAC staff do themselves well. No doubt this keeps up *esprit de corps* and morale. There's something tremendously impressive about these big organizations, as there is about a well-run ship, or airfield, or anything with discipline and an effective high command: something totally un-African.

And what about Clausen? Dr. Roland pointed from the veranda towards the hills.

"There's the end of your journey. Three kilometres, perhaps. You will find that while Dr. Clausen himself lives like a peasant, many people come to see him and there will be somewhere to stay. Allow me to hope that you will find what you are looking for."

There was irony in his voice. I suppose he thinks I'm a fool to have come so far in pursuit of such a vague objective. Unscientific. But he added:

"He is a strange man, this Dr. Clausen. He could be rich if he chose. His mind is like a well with no bottom, no one can see what lies down there. He is the only man I know

who is respected equally by Europeans and by Africans. Yet he lives here in a hut no better than my driver's, perhaps not as good."

"He's an enigma, and that's what I've come for—to try and explain it."

Dr. Roland shook his head. "If anyone could explain the mystery of Dr. Clausen, then Dr. Clausen would cease to exist, except perhaps as a piece of flesh and blood like this steward here, or my driver. It is the mystery that *is* Dr. Clausen. Be careful; if you destroy the legend, you will destroy the man."

I said that I had come to learn, not to denigrate.

"You're right," said Roland. "Dr. Clausen is stronger than his followers, as a legend is stronger than those who tell it. You will enjoy your talks with him, and write a book which everyone will admire. I wish you good fortune."

Dr. Roland has a sardonic air and I can't tell when he's serious, and when cynical; I'm sure only of his intelligence.

And so I start my real quest tomorrow.



## BOOK TWO

### *Luala*

THIS is an African place, I think that's my chief impression. There's no sense here of time, of clocks, of punctuality or bustle, no one giving orders, no one shouting or hurrying to and fro with papers, or indeed doing anything very much that I can see. One or two huts are going up in a desultory fashion, Africans are mixing clay and water and, with their hands, kneading mud into a framework of roughly woven sticks, half-asleep in the sunshine, like characters in a slow-motion film. I've never met a more "open" atmosphere; if a Mongolian walked in from Turkestan, or a motor magnate from Detroit, no one would pay attention, he could sit down in the shade of one of the big trees and a small boy would wander up and try to sell him a bunch of bananas.

When I asked for Dr. Clausen, people smilingly directed me towards a long, low thatched building whose veranda-posts are smothered in bougainvillea, as if wreathed in purple flames: an explosion of colour, the very quintessence of vividness. The bungalow is whitewashed and the brilliance of the contrast between the violent reds and purples and the sun-drenched whiteness takes one's breath away.

In a small, untidy room I found an elderly woman with the kind of face one has always seen before. Grey, wispy, undisciplined hair; long cheeks lined and furrowed; spectacles with steel rims; eyes guileless and innocent; a face familiar because I have so often seen it at church fêtes, on committees

formed to do good to some branch of "the human family," at horticultural shows, in vegetarian restaurants. It could be nothing but English: in days gone by its owner might have devoted herself to unmarried mothers, but now, more likely, to making compost, weaving scarves and cloche gardening. Such women need a cause as the earth needs rain, or engines oil; they can't function without it. Her cause is Ewart Clausen. She smiled at me, knowing what I wanted; I suppose she's the self-appointed filter between him and the world.

"You've come to see the Doctor, of course. He'll be busy until lunchtime, but if you care to join us for our meal he will talk to you then. Perhaps you aren't yet familiar with our routine?"

I said that I had just arrived.

"The Doctor works until twelve-thirty, he sees no one before then. But after that he's always glad to welcome visitors. So many come nowadays, you wouldn't believe! We feel as if we live at the hub of the universe. It's nice, of course, we thoroughly enjoy it, but I hope you understand that if the Doctor didn't make some rules, his work would suffer. But you're very welcome here."

There seemed to me no need whatever to apologize, and I asked if Clausen didn't find irksome these demands on his time; after all, he'd come to Luala to escape the distracting pressure of events and people.

"You misunderstand him," the lady said. "So many do, when they talk of escaping—Dr. Clausen hasn't the least intention of escaping anything. You haven't met the Doctor, I suppose?" She laughed, rather an engaging chuckle, the lines on her face crinkled all over like a walnut shell. "If you had, you wouldn't make that mistake. He came here not to teach, but to learn. That's another mistake people often make. But the Doctor will explain it himself. Now, would you like a cup of tea?"

I said this would be very welcome, but I also needed somewhere to stay. (The SMAC director is due tomorrow with his secretary on one of his inspection tours, so I must turn out of the resthouse immediately.) The lady, whose name is Arabella Young, responded as I'd hoped by inviting me to use one of their guesthouses.

"Don't expect luxury, we're very simple here, but we have the necessities: a bed, meals in the refectory, good fellowship and freedom to do as you please. Xenophon will arrange it."

"Xenophon?"

"He's the Doctor's personal attendant, but he practically runs the place, as you'll see; nothing would happen without Xenophon. You shall meet him now." She took a native goat-bell from a desk that would have been a secretary's nightmare and tinkled it.

"What's the charge for all this?"

She smiled. "What you like, and nothing if you can't afford it. We're not impractical idealists and no one can live without money so we hope you'll manage something, but we try to keep down to the minimum in both directions, getting and spending. We try to conserve our powers."

A queer place, this. The keynote appears to be complete individual freedom. Yet there must be discipline somewhere, with such a mixture of people always coming and going; the place ticks over. And if Clausen doesn't teach, what does he do?

A slight, wiry African dressed in a white jacket brought in a tray of tea. He had, I thought, a wise, patient face with a look of acceptance and resignation. Here is a man who knows his place: an honourable and respected place which he neither wants to exchange for a better nor fears to lose for a worse. He moves quietly and inspires confidence. Miss Young explained my needs; Xenophon smiled kindly, gave a

stiff little bow and said, in rather halting English, that a room was ready for me now.

"No other gentleman?" he inquired. "You come single?"

"Quite single. Dr. Roland brought me here."

Miss Young looked, I thought, surprised and plainly displeased, and said bleakly, "Oh! Is he back again?"

"He gave me a lift from Juba."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"I've never met him before. I suppose he's here a good deal now that Lua-la's to become a centre of research."

"He is a frequent visitor," Miss Young agreed, making it sound faintly disreputable, as if he smoked opium, or was too fond of young girls. She added, "I hope you will be comfortable and find what you seek, Mr. Colquhoun. Xenophon will show you where to sleep."

I followed Xenophon into the sunlight, past the blazing bougainvilleas and across the stubbly coarse grass to one of the many huts set down apparently at random in this straggling village, which has no clearcut beginning or end. My hut's a rough job, the whitewashed mud is flaking from cracked walls, the thatch is rotting and the roof timbers look none too safe, but it's a shelter and that's all one needs.

I thanked Xenophon, and said that I'd get my few things over—that Dr. Roland would perhaps bring them. "You know Dr. Roland, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, I know him. He comes to see our Doctor many times."

"Have you been with Dr. Clausen long?"

"Ever since he came here to Lua-la I have been with him." He smiled and gestured with his hands, taking in the whole camp. "One hut then for me and Doctor, now—" He created an encampment with his hands.

There's something friendly, reassuring, essentially simple about this elderly man; one feels at ease with him at once.

He hasn't a Negro caste of features, lacking the broad nose and heavy jaw, but he's very black; I wonder, from his springy gait, his shortness, his wiry limbs, whether there isn't Bushman blood in him somewhere, the only aboriginal blood in Africa. He's a man of resource, that's clear. The place must take a lot of running and I can't imagine that in this direction either Clausen or Miss Young are highly competent.

I walked back to the SMAC resthouse, about two miles, to collect my things. A lovely morning, but hot; I was in a muck sweat by the time I arrived. The resthouse looked a model of order and efficiency after the casual jumble of the Clausen encampment. Only Elizabeth was there, knitting on the veranda. She must have a very dull time but doesn't seem to resent it, or perhaps she doesn't say. It's hard to get anything out of Elizabeth.

"Where are you and James going?" I asked her. "I suppose you're being turned out too, to make way for the boss-man?"

"We shall stay in a house in the town. James has arranged it."

I can't make head or tail of this visit of James's, why he's here, how long he's staying. All I'm sure of is that Elizabeth doesn't like it and is ill at ease. She looked at me as I took up my haversack and small suitcase.

"I would like to go with you."

"Come along, then. Everyone seems welcome at Clausen's."

She smiled, and wriggled her shoulders. "I should have to hide from James."

She stretched her arms above her head, lifting her breasts as she did so, and very shapely and firm they looked under the jumper she always wore, however hot the weather; her arms are beautiful, she has the grace of a gazelle.

"I want to go from here," she said.

"What's James waiting for?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "It is Dr. Roland. He does what that man says."

Dr. Roland has many admirers, but neither Miss Young nor Elizabeth is among them.

He is bigger than I thought—a great bear of a man—and dreamier, less dominating. His face is deeply furrowed, networked with little lines, but his eyes have a directness, almost an innocence, that is disarming, and he has what I can only describe as a sweet expression, suggesting that his mind has no room in it for spite or pettiness. I've thought of his profile as leonine, but if he has anything of the lion in him it is one without claws. You sense at once a kind man, but a strong one also, who'd go his own way regardless of obstacles, human or otherwise, once he'd made up his mind.

I couldn't help asking myself, as we shook hands, whether this man, or any man, is worth coming half across the world to see. I had made up my mind to be disappointed. But in five minutes I decided that the answer's yes, it is worth while, and I'm not disappointed. Although he didn't say much, just polite generalities, I felt under the surface the latent strength and goodness of the man. Imagination? It could have been. Yet, of all the people one encounters, only a few stay in the memory, and these not because they're famous or handsome or clever, but because of what they are, something in themselves, some depth of character. The quality that above all others gives them this distinction is perhaps single-mindedness. Most of us are like jellyfish shoved this way and that by the tides, mentally shapeless and soft; these few are after something and they know what it is. "A man must know what he fights for and love what he knows." What is Clau-

sen's cause? Knowledge? Wisdom, understanding, adjustment?

A trace of Scandinavian accent gives his speech a drawn-out, almost booming sound like a bird in the marshes; he walks with a slight limp, the heritage no doubt of his mountaineering youth; he has the broad hands and wide-tipped fingers of the man of action; his eyes are ice-blue and getting long-sighted but he doesn't wear glasses (a touch of vanity?); his clothes look like sacks of potatoes; he has a strong loud laugh and a fondness for sucking peppermints; he doesn't smoke, and likes bright colours around him. The beams of the so-called refectory (only a slightly larger and more elongated hut) are painted scarlet, the walls yellow and the lamps, just blizzard lanterns, bright blue. The bougainvilleas are no doubt his idea. Miss Young quoted him as saying: "A man who's afraid of colour is afraid of life."

At lunch he was preoccupied and there was not much conversation. Fifteen or twenty people came in and sat down and drifted out when they had finished, there was no formal set meal. Only one other European appeared, an earnest-looking girl who's putting together for him some anthropological material. "The Doctor is making a comparative study of African religions, among other things," Miss Young said. He's also assembling an herbarium of plants used in native medicine. Like most Europeans who've studied the matter (not that it has been studied much) he's convinced that an immense store of pharmaceutical knowledge lies concealed beneath the magical practices of African doctors. They had remedies for everything and many of them worked. A lot of the drugs used in scientific medicine exist in these African plants—drugs that heal and drugs that kill also.

The others at the table were Africans, some of them residents, Miss Young said—laboratory assistants, a couple of postgraduate students, a dispenser, a librarian and others

whose functions I didn't discover. The rest were visitors like myself. They came from all over: from the Belgian Congo, from Nyasaland, from the Sudan, from Uganda: one even from San Thomé, right away on the other side of the continent. This I thought remarkable, that Africans from so many different countries, and from countries so far distant, should have heard of Clausen and have wished to see him, and that they should have been able to find the means to reach a place as yet so inaccessible. When I remarked as much to Miss Young she answered, "People will flock in thousands to see old ruined stones put into position a long time ago or a leaning tower, or a statue that's supposed to bleed; why are you surprised that a few will come to see one of the greatest men living?"

Many irons seem to be poking out of the fire at Lua-la: anthropology, botany, chemistry, philosophy, religion. What does it all add up to? I feel a need to get it mapped out and logically assembled. Already, after a day here, it strikes me that this may be a false approach. It's what Lua-la is and means that I have got to get hold of: what Clausen and his work mean to other people, all over the world. It's a question of influence. Miss Young says that Africans are proud of him because he's chosen to live amongst them in the spirit of inquiry, not of reform. He doesn't try to thrust "superior" European customs down their necks; he doesn't judge. He wrote somewhere: "Every man is a leaf of a single tree which can bear love or hatred on one root."

When our interview took place later in the day, I told Dr. Clausen straight out that I had come to write his biography. "You want me to sit for a portrait in words?" he said, smiling, and I think not displeased. He offered me a bull's-eye



out of a paper bag. "I am not a good sitter. The facts are known and published; editors of newspapers are kind enough to give me a place in their gallery, well below film stars, murderers and boxers, but perhaps a little way ahead of chiefs of staff and French prime ministers. What else is there that you want to know?"

The purpose, the method and the spirit of Luala, I replied: a notion of what he was now up to: a summing-up, and a look into the future. He shook his head at this.

"You set out to draw a picture of a log that is carried by a swift current from a distant forest to an unknown sea. The log itself is not very interesting; some knots and splinters and the maggots inside, for perhaps the log is not so sound as it appears. What is of interest is the river that the log obeys, its sources in the mountains, the waterfalls and rapids, the deep pools, the quiet estuary at the end of the journey. But that would be a lifetime's work, to chart that river, and then the work wouldn't be done."

I said I recognized my limitations, but did he mind my making the attempt? And—this was the crux—would he help me with papers and journals and, now and then, by word of mouth?

It was Arabella Young, he said, that I must ask for papers, she was the self-appointed watchdog of his desk, but they were scrappy and ill-balanced, he had lost everything in the war and had not since kept a journal. ("Too much is written now," he said. "It is a disease. Everything of importance was said two thousand years ago, except for the results of scientific experiments and the records of history. My scientific material, yes, that I have.") The rest, he added, was not significant. At least he doesn't object, and may help me: a propitious opening, I think.

He's a strangely—and I believe genuinely—modest individual. I mentioned my journey here with Roland. To tell

the truth, I was curious to know what Clausen thought of him. He said, "Why don't you write his life instead of mine? He'll leave a deeper mark on history than I shall."

I didn't know whether to take this as a joke; so I merely pointed out that Roland's name was unknown outside Africa, whereas his own had become a household word.

"Perhaps among the people you meet," he said, "but how many are they? A few hundred. You forget this: in Africa there are two hundred million people. Of course they won't all have heard of Dr. Roland. But in the years to come it may be that most of them will."

"Is he so good as that?" I asked.

"Good? Did I say that he was good?" He added, "It's not for himself, it's for his cause that he will be remembered."

We were walking across the sunlit compound, sweltering in heat, the tree-shadows black as treacle against the sharp, baked lightness of grass and soil. All at once he stooped and picked up a little earth in his fingers.

"In this pinch of dust there are perhaps a hundred million living creatures—half the population of Africa—each separate, breathing, eating, reproducing its kind. Because we cannot see them, that means nothing but that our eyes are coarse, imperfect instruments. Each of these grains of sand contains many million molecules, each fitting into a pattern like the stones of a great cathedral. In each molecule is a host of atoms, in each atom a solar system in miniature. In that solar system is a nucleus with particles revolving around it, and the distance between the particles is as great in proportion as the distance between earth and sun. A universe within a universe within a universe, world without end. So all these secret actions are performed between our finger and thumb, yet beyond the reach of our eyes and mind. How then can you hope to understand the secret life within a man's mind, behind the eyes and the tongue? You will stay here a week,

a month, a year if you please, and you will see nothing. But you are welcome to stay."

His gentle manner in delivering this bucketful of cold water almost removed its unmistakable chill. I thanked him and said, "I'll stay awhile and see all I can. You have a microscope, which enables you to explore some of those secret lives. A writer, I suppose, must try to probe a little deeper than the common vision, using his intuition (though I hate that word) as his instrument."

"I would rather writers were like goldsmiths who beat their metal into splendid works of art that give delight for generation after generation. Leave the probing to the scientists, whose task it is to look under the stones."

We reached the door of his office and laboratory, another hut like all the rest, and as we stood there talking in the sun I saw a strange figure approach. At first I took it for some kind of ape, it loped along with shoulders thrust forward and arms hanging by its side. It wasn't an ape, however, but a man, who steadied down to a shambling walk when he saw us. His hair was long and matted, his clothes torn and he had an idiot's grin on his face. He looked well-fed and not at all dangerous and he jabbered away in some unknown tongue as if he had a message he must immediately deliver.

Clausen drew back and stretched out one hand to the doorpost as if to steady himself. I could have sworn he was frightened; he looked at the idiot with a sort of despair. Yet this was an amiable sort of idiot, not the horrifying kind, although of course all idiots are disturbing—living caricatures that hit home too shrewdly. Perhaps, under all his brain and wisdom and rationality, Clausen conceals an uneradicated streak of superstition, the legacy of an ancestral faith in ogres and trolls.

The idiot came right up and caught hold of Clausen, who tried to shake him off, but every time he pulled away, the

creature only clung more firmly to his arm. The poor zany's long, unpared fingernails could have done a lot of damage if he'd turned nasty, but he showed no sign of this, he jabbered and slobbered and seemed, in his demented fashion, to be trying to tell Clausen something of importance. He was not a large man and Clausen could have thrown him off easily if he'd chosen to be brutal, but instead he shrank back with disgust and fear, there was no mistaking it, and muttered: "Call someone, quickly!"

I thought I could do him a service and seized the idiot's arms to haul him off. The poor devil had a long, jagged scar across his neck as if at some time he'd tried to cut his throat. He was stronger than he looked, which is often said to be the case with the half-witted. But at last I wrenched his claws off, tearing Clausen's shirt in the process. The idiot's face contorted with fury and I thought he was going to make a fight of it, but instead he gave a terrific shout, broke away and went off at full speed across the compound with his ape-like gallop.

"You should not have done that," Clausen said. He was shaking, and wiped his face with a handkerchief.

"I thought you didn't like his pawing you," I said, a little annoyed—after all, he had called out for help.

"I hated it. But in this country, idiots are sacred—they are possessed by spirits and to offend a spirit is a dangerous crime."

"*You* don't believe that!"

"I live among people who do and therefore I must try not to offend them. Many eyes were watching us."

The compound appeared deserted, but I looked more carefully and saw that he was right: the two builders had stopped work (if indeed they had ever started) and were sitting in the shade looking towards us; other loungers were to be seen in patches of shadow, in doorways, half-visible. Miss Young

was hurrying towards us in a state of consternation, her wispy hair quite out of control. She reached us panting, with eyes only for Clausen, and exclaimed, "That man's come back!"

"Yes," Clausen said grimly, brushing his shirt sleeve with the other hand as if to wipe away all traces of the idiot. "He's quite harmless. I regret that he took me unawares and startled me. No doubt one of his family will come to fetch him away."

The warning in his voice was unmistakable: it told her to shut up in front of a stranger. She looked at me—I don't think she had noticed me before, so great was her agitation—and then back at Clausen and said: "You must rest now, Doctor, an experience like that would shake up anyone's nerves. I'm glad Mr. Colquhoun was with you."

"Yes, I must thank you for your help," Clausen said formally. "You must forgive me if I spoke sharply. That unfortunate has been hanging around here before. I wish it were possible to give him treatment. There's no mental hospital nearer than Stanleyville."

Xenophon had by now appeared and clucked his tongue over the torn shirt sleeve. Clausen grew impatient and stalked off into his office, muttering about a lot of fuss for nothing; but it had not been nothing, he had been shaken to the root. Odd, but not my affair.

I should think Clausen must have been in almost every country in the world. I had no idea how much he's travelled and seen. His life will be even more fascinating to write than I expected and much more difficult. It's never been told in full.

At supper he was (so Miss Young subsequently told me) unusually expansive. In fact she said, "I have never known

him to talk so much about himself. You're fortunate, he finds you sympathetic, you manage to draw him out." I think she learnt things she hadn't known herself about his career.

It's all in scraps at present. I shall tackle each period separately and get him to fill in the many gaps. Here is a rough preliminary outline.

*Childhood.* He was born in 1890 in a fishing village not far from Trondheim and had for a father a tough, hard-working and successful fisherman who put aside his pennies, came to command his own vessel and built up the nucleus of a little fishing fleet before he died. "He was an ancestor, not a descendant—a founder, not an inheritor." The mother was a schoolteacher, and students of heredity might see in her a source of lively genes. Her grandfather had been a mathematician of some distinction and an uncle had won local fame as a poet. There was a tradition, Clausen said, that his maternal great-grandfather, who had been a wanderer and lived for a while among the Lapps, had brought back from the mountains a bride who was a fairy, and that when she'd reared her son she disappeared to rejoin her own folk in the forests and was never seen again. "She left her eyes to all her children and grandchildren," he said. He laughed at the story but I think it gives him pleasure to have this touch of mystery and romance in his ancestry.

His father must have been austere, frugal and self-disciplined as only a northerner can be. Every penny was counted, every minute of the day put to some useful purpose, work was a fetish, the merest hint of luxury an abomination. Clausen told me an anecdote that epitomized the man. Towards the end of his life, and after years of persuasion by his wife, he put himself into the hands of a doctor who prescribed a daily glass of wine with his midday dinner. But after a while he refused to continue with it. "I have noticed that it makes me feel good-humoured," he said. "Such false

feelings are temptations of the devil and I won't build a bridge for him."

As a father he was stern and exacting. The children feared him, as one would expect, but they also loved him in a buried, inarticulate way and he deeply influenced their lives.

There was no real hardship, but no indulgence either. The boys were taught to fend for themselves. From an early age Ewart displayed the wandering instincts of the great-grandfather who'd married the fairy, and went off on long expeditions in the mountains with a brother (now dead). Sometimes they went to sea in their father's trawler and experienced the North Sea gales and learnt to haul nets with frozen fingers, and once he went into the Arctic with a sealing expedition and was away half a year. He was enraptured by the Arctic scenery but nauseated by the clubbing of the baby seals and he vowed never again to take, if he could avoid it, the life of an animal. (He admits that this is an impossible ideal to carry out and cannot be applied to such creatures as bacteria and mosquitoes, but he is a vegetarian and will never use a gun.)

One can see how he's reacted against all this austerity and discipline and how the warmth and generosity of the sun-filled countries, when he encountered them later, came as a revelation and conquered him. But in his own personal life he has retained many of those pinched early habits. He sleeps always in a camp bed and tolerates no touch of self-indulgence in his surroundings; he will eat only simple food and drink no alcohol. He works eighteen hours a day. Yet he has this craving for colour and brightness and has left his northern forests for the open, lazy land of Africa with its blaring sunshine, the tempo of the siesta, the slipshod make-this-do attitude and the blaze of bougainvilleas, the glory of the flowering creepers and trees. There are two men at war

within him, ascetic and voluptuary. In that, perhaps, lies the secret of his genius, the spark struck by iron and flint, the male and female elements in one nature that fuse new life from their poles.

*Youth.* From an early age the young Ewart was fascinated by the birds, beasts and fishes of his surroundings, the elk in the forests that he hunted with dogs (this was before his experience with the seals), the birds and insects and all the wild life around him. He wanted to live out of doors and study nature, he knew that from the start. His father disapproved. God certainly created other species but he created man to rule and use them, not to waste time studying them, still less to admire them, an attitude which embraced more than a hint of paganism. The proper business of mankind was work and money-making, and one day when Ewart was away he destroyed a collection of moths, butterflies, beetles and birds' eggs that had taken years to assemble. Ewart respected his father too much to rebel openly, but that finished any prospect of his entering the trawler business, as his father had wished. "Fate has always helped me," Clausen said. "If that had not occurred, I might have done as my father intended and one day become the owner of a small trawler fleet. As it was, I resolved to go to the university and devote my life to studying the beetles he despised."

His mother helped him—she must have been a woman of character. She raised the money somehow but he had a struggle for the next few years and knew real poverty. In the summer vacations he earned money felling trees. He passed his examinations with distinction and won a gold medal and, more important at the time, a bursary. He was by then marked down (one could infer this, he didn't say it) as an outstanding student and had no more trouble to earn a living, though he's never been rich.

It wasn't beetles he took up, it was viruses and then cell-



structure, a study of the ultimate basis of life. He was fascinated by what lies beyond the range of vision, even vision with the microscope's aid, by the territory beyond the frontiers of knowledge. At that time very little was known about viruses, organisms which seem to straddle the borderline of life, a link between the living and the not-alive, and he set himself to find out more, mainly through a study of certain plant diseases. He managed to get himself included in an expedition to the Andes to search for new forms of potato mosaic disease; he was away for over a year, climbed several of the peaks and, as a sideline, brought back some information about a hitherto unknown Indian tribe which started him off on a lifelong interest in anthropology. His papers on the virus material he had gathered made his name as one of the brightest of the younger biologists, a name which continued to grow in lustre for the next twenty-five years until his scientific fame culminated in the winning of the Nobel Prize for his work on nucleic acid and the structure of the living cell.

*Travels.* These will take a lot of sorting out. Soon after the Andes trip, the First World War imposed a period of confinement to Norway which helped his career by obliging him to consolidate and peg away at basic studies, supplemented by teaching. After that war he embarked on a long expedition to Burma and Indo-China, again in search of plant viruses, but instead of returning in the orthodox way he went off on his own, crossed into China and travelled through Sinkiang and Mongolia to Peking, and returned through Asiatic Russia. How he managed this I don't yet know, it would make a book on its own, for this was over thirty years ago when central Asia was hardly more accessible than in Marco Polo's day. And his was no expensive, planned expedition: he just wandered, attaching himself to trading caravans and, on one occasion, to a German botanist who,

with his wife, was trying to get to Lhasa but was murdered by tribesmen on the border. Clausen rescued the wife, brought her safely into China and subsequently married her.

He was reticent about all this; he said, "I will give you the facts, but no more. I won't have my private life mounted on a slide for anyone to peer at and if that is your intention, you must go away." From his tone and from the things he left unsaid I derived the impression, which may well be quite false, that the subject was painful to him and the marriage, therefore, not a success. I had to ask him, awkwardly, whether his wife was still living. He shook his head, frowned, and replied, "Unfortunately, no." His tone effectively discouraged curiosity.

*Middle Period.* This, the crucial part of a man's life, when either he ripens and sets seed or wastes himself (perhaps through restlessness or some error of judgment) on futile false starts and blind alleys, was spent by Clausen mainly in research and teaching, first at Oslo and then, for a while, in America, where he held chairs in Texas and in California. America's bigness, boldness and impetuous self-confidence fascinated him; he quoted Carl Sandburg on the stimulus it gave him "to feel a continent under the ball of your feet." Yet I gained the impression that he hadn't been altogether happy there, despite the fame which came to him and a good deal of lionization, inspired less by his researches, which were recondite ("I wrote a book that only three other men could understand—one in Japan, one in Massachusetts and one in Germany") than by the wanderings he could not forego.

He disappeared into the Pacific for a year spent mainly in canoes partly to test a theory of Melanesian migration—in some ways an anticipation of the Kon Tiki saga, though less spectacular and publicized—and partly to study plankton in relation to the distribution of fishes. He spent a winter in

Alaska, he climbed Peruvian peaks; some restless impulse drove him away continually from his laboratory and desk to demonstrate a duality in his nature which I feel to be the key to the man. Flamboyance and austerity, colour and simplicity, impulsive wandering and meticulous lab-bound research, the mighty mountain and the infinitely minute nucleus of the cell—these opposites seem always to attract him and then to make war in his mind. And there are areas of reticence I shall never penetrate—his marriage, his loves, the ultimate reasons for his retirement to Luala. A man of contradictions, a man of extremes.

There's much about him that is mystifying, complex, unsatisfied. Is he in flight from some element in his own nature? Or perhaps reaching out for the unreachable? A man to whom "the wind says: Pursue." Fanciful, all this—one thing's certain, his fascination and strength of personality. I can see why he has such influence over Africans. They share with him something hard to describe—an implicit belief in unseen natural forces which they don't attempt to analyze and name, but accept and try to live with. Coexistence. The difference is that he asks questions, they don't. It's odd to find this semioccult approach in a scientist who's spent his life trying to reduce the very structure and origin of life to fact and order. When I tried to express this he laughed and said, "Whatever we discover, however much we learn to control, it will be only a fragment of a fragment of the outer shell of knowledge, a shadow of a shadow of reality. Every scientist worth two cents knows this."

We didn't touch last night on the later phases of his career, in themselves enough to fill volumes: his escape from Norway early in the war, his work in the Pacific on certain tropical diseases, his return to the Far East in the van of the Allied Forces—I think he was about the first to set foot in Indonesia—and the superb humanitarian work he did in recondition-

ing Allied ex-prisoners. And then his equally remarkable, though less famous, work among displaced persons from Eastern Europe, many of whom he helped to re-establish in North and South America. He must have saved thousands of lives; not since Nansen has one man been personally responsible for so many. But his attempt to help the Arabs driven out of Israel proved a failure: even Clausen couldn't prevail upon Jews and Arabs to put compassion above hatred. Was it this failure that drove him to the unexpected step of renouncing all his work and fame and burying himself in Lu-ala? That's for another occasion; I feel at least I've made a start.

The greatest blow is that he has no journals. Some of the material has been preserved in his books but these are mainly scientific-philosophic, like *The Nature of Nature* and *Quintessence of Dust*. He did, however, write a book about the Andes, and a short one on his Pacific voyages. And of course there's material scattered in his many, many scientific papers, but these are in the main severely academic; it's the personal side that's lacking. The absence of the least record, for instance, of his marriage—all this is the dark side of the moon.

Today I had a surprise. Good, or bad? I don't know; disturbing, anyway; I wish it hadn't happened and I'm delighted that it has.

I decided to walk to the SMAC resthouse, by way of Lu-ala, to see if James was still there. Already Lu-ala begins to wear the look of a frontier town, like one of those places in the old American West, with shacks being run up and lorries bumping through the dusty, potholed street. It's SMAC, of course, that brings in the bustle, with their building program which is drawing contractors to the place—Africans and one Greek

so far, Christopholis, a harbinger. There are several half-finished houses made of planks or mud-and-wattle, and the store selling petrol and beer does a roaring trade. In a few years I suppose Luala will be quite a town and one day old stagers will tell stories of the wild animals they shot where the post office now stands. Africa is full of old men who shot lions in what is now the main street of Nairobi, Salisbury, Lusaka or Broken Hill.

As it happened I ran into James. He was sitting on the veranda of one of the shacks in a pair of purple pajamas with yellow dragons all over it—a startling sight. He waved at me with enthusiasm, ran into the street and practically dragged me back to his veranda, where a bottle of brandy stood on the floor beside his deck chair. I should think he'd drunk about half of it already that morning.

"You look happy," I said.

He clapped me on the shoulder. "You have hit on it exactly, my dear Andrew. I am happy, I am well-fed, the sun shines! Don't you like Luala? Don't you think it's a finer place than Nairobi? It isn't very civilized, I agree—no buses and car-parks, no judges in wigs, no big skyscraper offices and no important politicians to talk about a bastion of Christian culture—all the same I like Luala very much."

"It's certainly given you the holiday spirit," I remarked.

"You're right, it's a holiday, at least, there's no dressing up to go to court, 'may it please your lordship,' 'in my submission, my lord,' 'in the case of the Crown versus Abdulahai Virji' and then books, books, books, until the day is gone. If all the books were put together and scattered over us like rain, they would cover the world ten feet deep and we should drown underneath them. Have a drink, my dear Andrew, my good friend."

I said that I didn't drink in the daytime.

"That's a stupid British idea," he protested. "What's the

difference between morning and evening? Does the taste change after dark? This brandy is all right, drink some with me."

James made it impossible for me to refuse, and shouted loudly for Elizabeth to bring another glass, which she did without smiling, or looking directly at either of us, and then padded silently away.

"Elizabeth doesn't share your enthusiasm for Lua-la," I said.

"Elizabeth's a foolish girl, I almost wish I hadn't brought her. She's afraid of strangers. But then there's nothing to be afraid of in Lua-la, is there?" He laughed as if at some tremendous joke. I asked how much longer he intended to stay.

"It won't be much longer now. A few days. Everything has gone well, there remains only the gathering together, and then we can go home each to his own place, like stags that have joined forces to grow horns and, when the time comes, scatter each to his own country."

"I thought you came here for a holiday," I said.

"So I did, so I did—isn't this a holiday, sitting on this veranda in fine silk pajamas which I can see you don't approve of, Andrew, like the brandy, or being kept waiting, or so many things? Now what do you think of Dr. Clausen? Is he as big as you expected, are you pleased with him or doesn't he behave as you thought?"

"Thank you, I'm satisfied with Dr. Clausen. But I've taken on a big task—no holiday."

"Yes, you are right," James agreed, helping himself to another dollop of brandy. "Dr. Clausen is like a deep, deep pool with many queer fishes swimming about at the bottom. I must admit that Dr. Clausen is rather a mystery to me. He is a European, and I don't know why he lives here or why his name is known in so many places, but that's how it is."

If I could have pumped James at this point I might have got a clue to some of the riddles Luala seems to provide; but James, well-oiled or dead sober, is fly, and a direct question would have scared him like gunshot. So I tried an oblique approach.

"Yet he told me that Roland's name is better known than his own. That surprised me."

"Oh, he is right there. I know of Dr. Clausen, my friends have heard of him, so have many educated people, but Roland—he is known to everyone, to all the shamba-boys and posho-eaters from Cairo to Salisbury."

My expression must have betrayed my bewilderment. I saw a flicker pass over James's face that might have been alarm, warning, anger, anything: it was as if he had pulled himself up at the edge of a cliff. He didn't for an instant lose his head, he raised his glass and toasted Dr. Roland, and added, "He has a funny name, do you know that? Bernadotte. Of course it's French. Can you speak French, Andrew? I've tried to learn a little but I'm not very good. Few can speak English here, so I've had to do my best. *N'importe que le mur soit haut, la petite taupe sait passer au-dessous.*"

"What's a *taupe*?"

"A little burrowing creature with a fur coat."

"You speak French better than I do. Why are most Africans so good at languages?"

"Because we have too many ourselves. Too many small tribes, too many little chiefdoms, too many languages. We need to sweep some of them away."

"And become mass-produced, like the rest of us?"

"And become strong enough to stand up to you, Andrew. Unity is strength! Divide and rule!"

"If you want to sell your soul for a mess of slogans I can't stop you." I rose to go. James in his astonishing pajamas, leaning back at ease in his chair with his feet on the veranda

rail, looked a picture of indolence and good humour, another creature altogether from the self-controlled, soberly-dressed barrister I had known in Nairobi. There seemed to be a coarser, earthier look to him now, a relaxation of his facial muscles that gave his features a stamp of sensuality, even of cruelty. This was a different James—the real James perhaps? Both Jameses, I suppose, are equally real, but this is an older and more basic one than the Nairobi James, who will no doubt return.

Perhaps that's what makes Elizabeth unhappy, she's not at home with the two Jameses. So far as I can see there is only one of her, whether she's here or in Nairobi, and she fears this other James, who indeed treats her pretty roughly.

"Are you going up to the resthouse," James asked, still lol-ling in his chair, "to see the great Mr. Zuckermann?"

"Is that the big gun from SMAC?"

"Yes. He arrived yesterday. And so the company's flag flies from the top of the pole, lord of all it surveys—the great company, represented by the great Zuckermann. He's what they used to call a tycoon when I was in England. Do they still use that word?"

"What has this Zuckermann come here for?"

"A king must sometimes inspect his kingdom. The lion comes to sniff his kill. Mr. Zuckermann is a great lion here; he is going to put up buildings, monuments—a clinic for Roland, something or other for Dr. Clausen. You should go and see him, you should meet the great man while you have the opportunity. Besides, he has brought a secretary, I hear, a beautiful young woman, she might do for you nicely, Andrew, if she isn't too skinny, like so many of the English girls."

His words annoyed me—quite unreasonably, anyone might have made a remark like that, and I'm afraid there was a kind of racial jealousy at the bottom of my anger. Had a



white man said that I should have thought it silly but not offensive, it wouldn't have made me want to bash his smirking face. It's disconcerting. One thinks one's quite free from prejudice and doesn't hesitate to condemn it in others but when it comes to the point, out it pops from some hidden burrow.

I passed off his remark and I don't think he noticed anything, he was well away with the brandy by then. He's let a very small kitten out of the bag. What's this "gathering together" he spoke of? The growing of horns? As for Roland—his reputation as an expert on nutrition would hardly extend to every shamba-boy and posho-eater from Cairo to Salisbury.

When I reached the rest-camp (quite a climb, on foot) the flag was flying, as James had said: a resplendent affair in green and gold with a crest on it. A big American car stood in the shade of a tree, various Africans were squatting or lounging around the place, and a couple of white-coated stewards were bustling about. I nearly turned away, as after all I had no business here, but forced myself to go and ask for Roland; I meant to thank him for the transport before he vanished on some business of the company's. But I never did find Roland. As I walked into the living room I almost collided with a girl. She was in a white dress with large red flowers on it, she looked wonderfully cool and well-groomed and carried papers in her hand. The perfect secretary, at home in this oasis in the far-distant bush. I stood stock-still in her path, probably gaping. It was Gemma Kreiss.

She laughed; no doubt I looked an idiot; she had the advantage on me, for she'd probably heard that I was in Luala. We exchanged the usual remarks. This was the post she'd applied for, but thought she wouldn't get, when I met her at Mrs. Ogilbie's. Zuckermann had bundled her off on tour as soon as she'd stepped into the job. It was all new and exciting, she looked twice as animated and much more attractive

than when I'd met her on the farm. That had been a period of waiting and uncertainty, now she was once more established, her feet on the ladder, and money, I expect, in her purse; it made a lot of difference. She and Zuckermann are here for only three days.

"That's a long time for Zuk," she said. "In Stanleyville they call him *aujourd'hui* because that's when he always wants his answer."

"Type casting," I suggested. "The stage tycoon."

"Yes, but I think he's kind, and his recreation is fishing. One can always trust anglers, did you know that? You must meet him while he's here, he'd be a useful contact."

"I'm not looking for a job." I probably sounded gruff, for she seemed a bit offended and said that she must get on with her work. I asked her when we could meet.

"Why not come around after dinner tonight for coffee? And I'll introduce you to Zuk."

She spoke of him as if he were a prize possession, as one who'd say: I've bought a Rembrandt, come and admire it. I would have retorted that I didn't want to see Zuk, I wanted to see her, but she was gone with her papers, the ever-ready secretary. All good secretaries assume a kind of gloss, a protective coating, as if they'd been dipped in nail varnish, and she was no exception.

I've been trying hard to keep Gemma out of my mind. She lies in wait for me at every leisure moment and I've been fool enough to relive a hundred times those few and inconclusive moments by the dam. Just when I was beginning to get control, I had to run into her. A stroke of fate, like one's name on a bullet? But it's only for three days. I shall spend the evening working on the Clausen papers.

I did go after all. It seemed silly not to; when the next three days are over our paths are never likely to cross again. Besides, I was curious to meet Zuckermann. There was a time when he'd have made me prickles all over with socialist sentiments. He'd have been, almost literally, an agent of the devil in my eyes. Now I'm more tolerant, or more indifferent, I don't know which—two sides, in any case, of the same coin.

He's rather as I expected: a big, broad-shouldered fellow with a heavy jowl, a long, sallow face and a rather bulging forehead. He has an indefinably Germanic look (I believe he's actually a Hollander) which may be due to the cut of his suit. He looks humourless and efficient—the efficiency of course goes without saying. He wears a brown cornelian ring on his left hand and has black shiny shoes. I suppose he commands a larger budget than most governments between Egypt and South Africa. And uses them more sensibly, too. He runs a welfare state as well as a host of mines, plantations, forests, factories, railways and at least one shipping line. How can one individual cope with it all? The art of devolution, I suppose. Yet in thirty years' time no one will have heard of him and a boy like Chatterton, who died at seventeen, was a failure and a forger and wrote a few by no means (in my opinion) first-class poems, is an immortal.

Gemma was there and also the *administrateur* of the district, a dark-joweled, lean, slightly-built individual who chain-smoked and looked intelligent but nervous. I will try here to give the gist of the conversation which went on for nearly two hours, and clarified a good deal in my mind.

They started on this educational project of Clausen's. It seems that Zuckermann, not Clausen, is the instigator. Clausen is quite willing to expound his views to anyone who comes in the spirit of a disciple, and many do come, but the notion of the organized centre, a sort of Athenian academy-

in-the-bush where the élite of Africa's new generation sit at his feet and learn ripe philosophy based on scientific principles, is not his. It comes from this dynamic head of SMAC, who regards Clausen simply as a weapon in the struggle for Africa which is now in progress and must be fought to a finish with every device that can be deployed by either side.

"Make no mistake," Zuckermann said, and he was very much in earnest, "this is a battle for the continent, and perhaps even more than that, for the survival of the West. It is a battle between the forces of reason, progress and civilization and the forces of fear, hatred and tyranny—the forces of darkness—which have been entrenched for untold centuries in these forests and bushlands and are now rising up again with a strong new ally: the faith of nationalism. This nationalism is a modern Lorelei who lures voyagers to their destruction. She is outwardly so beautiful that men are deceived; once victorious, she must do two things. She must split this continent into the little tribal states and kingdoms which are its basic units, and she must deliver the bemused and cheated people to those individuals, not more than a few hundred in all, who have mastered the tricks and arts of rulership.

"Only one result can come of these two trends. Reversion to a welter of little states full of tyranny and cruelty, full of poverty and cheating; adieu to the chances of lifting the people from savagery and ignorance into a life that won't be perfect, but will offer opportunity. That is why we must fight this form of nationalism with every effective weapon at our command. There is one weapon we should not need to use, for it is a weapon that will turn against us like a boomerang, and that is force. We must fight with the weapon in which we have superiority, and that is our intelligence. We must fight with personalities, with emotions, with ideas."

"And with money," I suggested.

"Certainly. With every weapon that we have except guns."

I suppose I should have agreed respectfully, but his dogmatism nettled me and so I said, "There's another way of looking at nationalism—as a movement of liberation from the rule of one race by another, from colonialism which, however well-intentioned (and can we be sure it is?) destroys the soul of a subject people. Or, again, as a revolt against the penetration of a continent by alien adventurers and companies whose shareholders in Europe—"

"Draw fat dividends from the exploitation of the toiling African masses who perform their forced labour for sixpence a day. Yes, yes, I know it all, surely we needn't waste time repeating stale propaganda. We've not much time to close our ranks and win at least the first stages of the battle before massive reinforcements cross the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea from Asia to the aid of our enemies. That these reinforcements are themselves new conquerors in disguise won't matter—to us. It will matter to the Africans, but in their present stage they are too stage-struck with their Lorelei to see that."

I thought of old Tantrum and his Asian Menace—how delighted he'd have been to hear this big gun booming on his side! I believe this is what's known as "global thinking."

Zuckermann went on: "I have told you what will happen if nationalism triumphs and it's no good introducing red herrings like dividends and exploitation and colonialism. But there is one alternative. No, not an alternative, I think, so much as a sequel. My dear young man"— He waved at me the hand with the cornelian ring— "I can sit here and I can prophesy the future of this continent as plainly as you can prophesy that you will sleep tonight and wake tomorrow morning. The falling-apart that I have spoken of, the splintering as this tumbler would splinter if I dropped it now; the spread (all this would be fairly gradual) of tyranny, cor-

ruption, and cruelty; the breakdown of civilized standards; and then, at some stage or another—I won't try to say when—the gathering together of all the fragments into other hands. These hands would not be ours and they would not be so gentle or so merciful. You may say that our hands are not clean. Perhaps, but these would be a great deal dirtier. They would be Communist hands."

Now it was he, I suggested, who was introducing red herrings; because Africans rejected colonialism, it didn't follow that they'd accept another version of it disguised as communism; nor did I share his belief that they wouldn't be able to manage their own affairs. If they listened to the songs of Lorelei, he was so steeped in the myth of race superiority that he couldn't see or understand the new emerging Africa with its pride and teachability. Still, I said, this argument could go on forever: what had it got to do with Clausen? Was he supposed to be a stooge of SMAC's and preach anti-nationalism?

Not unnaturally, Zuckermann was annoyed. The argument had got rather heated and I wasn't behaving with the deference due to, and expected by, a fully-plumaged tycoon. In fact I was being foolish, as Gemma told me afterwards, but men like Zuckermann always rub me the wrong way.

Of course, he said, Clausen wasn't to be a stooge. His influence over Africans, especially the intellectuals, was great and it was an influence wholly on the side of reason, common sense and decency—"in fact, if I may use a preacher's phrase, brotherly love. You think that I'm trying to use brotherly love as a cloak for capitalist designs—a new version of philanthropy at five per cent. You are wrong. I am trying to save this continent from a welter of unnecessary bloodshed, misery and hatred.

"Clausen is a scientist," Zuckermann went on. "He believes, therefore, in reason as opposed to superstition and

emotion. He understands that causes produce effects, that life must follow certain rules and, above all, that race, colour, religion, class, all these barriers, are like earthworks that men have thrown up for protection from the angry wolves of loneliness and futility. He knows, and he proclaims, that the human intelligence can surmount such ramparts. He knows that it's the nationalists who feed on racial prejudice and build their false utopias on the narrow basis of the tribe. If Clausen can get some of this across—and apparently he needs to start with young men like you—he will at least sow seeds of doubt in the minds of these cocksure young nationalists. And seeds of doubt grow sometimes into the tender plants of humility. And humility, as you know (or should know) is the beginning of wisdom.”

It was ironical to hear Zuckermann talk in this fashion—how much humility has he got, let alone doubt, with his streamlined money-making octopus?

“What is it you want to do for Clausen?” I asked.

“I want to establish here a school of which he'll be the head, the foundation and the inspirer. It will be something unique in Africa, perhaps in the world. He will be free to conduct his researches as he pleases, so long as he will lecture sometimes and supervise a small hand-picked staff.”

“Africans won't come to a school that teaches none of the skills they need in their efforts to build up their own countries. How can they afford to? It's technique they're after, know-how, the means to hold their own.”

“Africans go to him now. Men like that have always drawn an audience and will always do so. Perhaps you may say it's an audience of cranks, that he's a crank himself. That may be partly true. But I see a situation that is growing desperate, and I say to myself: what weapons have we? We've no time to forge guided missiles or to build hydrogen bombs. We must take, if need be, the rusty sword down from the

wall. Not that I think Clausen is a rusty sword. I think the approach is indirect; it is not the only approach, but it is worth trying. Does that satisfy you?"

I replied that it might satisfy me but it wouldn't satisfy men like Roland and James Gichini; they trusted Clausen because they believed him to stand right outside the racial struggle or even to sympathize with them; if they saw that he was backed by a big, profit-making European firm like SMAC he'd at once become suspect in their eyes.

"That is a danger," Zuckermann admitted. "But Clausen will be able to overcome it. They trust his word and if he says that this money comes to him without strings, they will believe him."

"Will that be true?"

Zuckermann shrugged his shoulders irritably; his patience was wearing thin and I can't say I blamed him. My role was to listen in respectful silence to the master plans formulated by the mastermind, and here I was arguing, even questioning his honesty. Gemma had said nothing at all. She'd moved her chair back from the table at which we sat and appeared to be wholly concentrated on some needlework in her hands. The white, thin light of the pressure lamp made her dark hair glisten and her face and hands seem pale as milk, and brought queer, exciting shadows to a face that seemed to hold a world of mystery. All the time I'd been conscious of her presence, which half-stimulated and half-disconcerted me. If she had not been there I should have been less free with my opinions; unwillingly, I had been to some extent showing off. Yet I suspected that she didn't approve, and when she raised her eyes and looked at me I was quite sure of it.

"You mentioned Dr. Roland," Zuckermann said, with the kind of casualness that deceives no one. "What do you know of him?"

This brought a stir from the French *administrateur* who'd



hitherto kept his mouth shut. I had touched some chord with that name.

"Very little beyond the fact that he's famous from one end of Africa to the other."

"Who told you that?"

"Clausen, for one. Isn't it true?"

Zuckermann now spoke carefully, and with a wariness as plain as his cigar. "Dr. Roland has an international reputation as a biochemist. It is natural for other Africans to take a pride in him."

"Has his reputation as a biochemist reached all the—what was it—shamba-boys and posho-eaters of the continent, who don't know a protein from a billy goat?"

The Frenchman, whose name is Rivière, and who, since Roland was mentioned, had been keeping silence with difficulty, could now no longer hold himself in. He spoke volubly to Zuckermann. My French is too poor to reproduce all he said but the gist was plain enough: I told you so, didn't I tell you that you have been deceived?

Zuckermann didn't like it, but he listened. Then he turned to me. "You spoke of Roland as a nationalist. How have you derived that impression?"

"I came up with him from Juba with a friend of mine who makes no bones about being an active nationalist. Dr. Roland is his guide, philosopher and master. Roland is also famous from Cairo to Salisbury—but not, I would suggest, for biochemistry. There's only a single tree one can bark up, so far as I can see."

Rivière writhed on his chair and gesticulated feverishly, crying: "*C'est vrai, c'est vrai, c'est absolument vrai*," and other phrases of encouragement.

"It is easy to leap to conclusions," Zuckermann said heavily. "Did you gather any other impressions?"

"I gathered a fact, or what I believe to be a fact. Namely,

that within the next few days there's to be some kind of meeting, or gathering, here at Lua-la or within reach of it, which leaders from many different countries—one at least from as far off as Nairobi—will attend."

That was too much for Rivière altogether; he thumped the table and poured out a flood of words. This, it seemed, or something like it, was what he had been trying to get across for months, that Lua-la was the headquarters, or at any rate *a* headquarters, of a subversive movement which was a great deal better organized and more widespread than anything the authorities had met with hitherto.

"It has been coming," he said. "For years I have seen it coming. It is inevitable. So far, it is because these movements have been local that we have been able to deal with them. Even so, it has been touch and go at times and have you noticed one thing? Always, we are taken by surprise by the extent of the organization, by the degree of planning and by the skill. We say: 'I didn't think they had it in them to do this.' The time must come when these local movements will come together, coalesce, to form something bigger and more formidable. For that, they need a leader, a man of intellect, a Napoleon of the black masses. Well, they have found him. He has arrived. And all these people who are stirred by the emotions will come together spontaneously and they will do as he says."

"And what will that be?" Zuckermann asked.

"Ah, that I cannot tell. Who can guess? Perhaps not yet: perhaps we see now only the forging of the bonds. But when the time comes—" He threw up his hands and snapped his fingers, a gesture of eviction, of finality.

"You make it sound too dramatic for my liking," said Zuckermann.

"It is life that is dramatic, not I. When we are on the stage

ourselves the play seems slow and formless, but the audience knows better. We approach now a climax of events."

"Very well, I won't argue with you," Zuckermann said. "If all you say is true, the urgency is even greater than I have believed it to be. But there's one point on which you must still convince me, and that is Dr. Roland's part in all this. That he's a nationalist in sympathy I don't doubt; it's only natural; but that he would lend himself to the intrigues of a secret conspiracy I cannot believe."

"That's only because you know and like him as a man. Believe me, Monsieur, personal likes and aversions do not enter into this. In a civil war a man may fight against his own brother. This is something bigger than the individual."

But Zuckermann still would not surrender. He continued, "I've known Roland for many years, ever since he first joined our staff, fresh from the Sorbonne. He is a man of science, with a keen objective, analytical brain—a *Western* brain, not that of an African. And, after all, he isn't an African at all, in reality, or only partly one. He is partly European, did you know that? He was born in Cairo. His father was an African, a man who won distinction in Paris as a dancer, but his mother was half European. She was the daughter of a Sudanese doctor who married an Irish nurse. It's true that he's only a quarter European in blood, but he has been brought up in a wholly European way, he is totally *déraciné*. And for twenty years he has been a good servant of the company. I find it hard to believe that he leads this double life you attribute to him."

Rivière shrugged his shoulders. "It is always hard to believe. That is because we lack imagination, we cannot comprehend people who do not think, and therefore behave, just as we think and behave ourselves. Yet how many of our friends have done nothing that would make us exclaim: I wouldn't have believed it of him! Or for that matter, hasn't

each one of us some episode, some course of conduct in our lives that we keep hidden and would die of chagrin were the world to know of it?"

I was startled now by Gemma; she pushed her chair back and rose abruptly, and I caught on her face, for an instant, an expression that mystified and distressed me. She looked shocked, as if she'd seen or heard something appalling: her face was momentarily frozen, like someone confronted with the Medusa. Yet what was there in the conversation to shake her like this? A reference to some shameful crime or vice? Surely she couldn't nurse a secret quite so guilty, and in any case the remark had been in very general terms. I glanced quickly around the room, wondering whether she hadn't seen something to alarm her in the shadows, but when I looked back her expression had gone; perhaps, after all, it was only a trick of the light. She got up rather stiffly and turned her back to put her needlework on the chair.

"I expect you would like the drinks brought now." Her voice was perfectly controlled but stiff, like her movements.

"Call the steward," Zuckermann said.

"Very well."

Neither Zuckermann nor Rivière had noticed anything. She walked across the room with her arms held to her sides, as though with a conscious effort. A few minutes later the steward brought a tray of drinks. Gemma's needlework lay neglected on the pushed-back chair, she didn't come back to fetch it. That empty chair nagged at me for the rest of the evening.

Rivière had shaken Zuckermann, but still not convinced him. Roland was his pet, a performing seal he'd fed and trained to show the world how "good" Africans can rise to any heights with SMAC; ability is all that matters, race doesn't count. Also I got the impression that Zuckermann

was really fond of him and just couldn't believe that he would double-cross his benefactors.

"It's not in character," he kept on saying— He spoke mainly in English, Rivière replied in French, it was a curious conversation.

"What do we know of anyone's character?" Rivière retorted. "We are all actors. To our wives we are one man, to our employers another, to our friends a third, and again a different man to our enemies. Roland is ambitious, that is the key."

"I shall do nothing without proof," Zuckermann said.

This caused another explosion from Rivière. "Proof, proof, proof! What do you demand—that he should swear as a witness 'I am a traitor, I am a deceiver, I plot behind your back'? We have no proof of these matters and we cannot have it. If we offer money, what is the good of that? It is like offering a reward for the tails of rats. Then a man will catch some rats, start a rat-farm and bring the tails for the cash. It is even easier to invent stories than to breed rats."

Zuckermann said to me, "You mentioned a meeting. What do you know about that?"

"I shall not act as your informer," I said, nettled by his tone.

Zuckermann looked then at Rivière. "If there is to be a meeting, it will be known to many people, and no doubt some rumour of it will reach the ears of the *administrateur*."

"Rumour!" Rivière exclaimed. "That's all it is, rumour! I hear plenty of those. And I'll tell you what will happen in this case. Two days, three days, after it occurs I will hear some talk, at secondhand or thirdhand of course, never a direct testimony, that there has been a clandestine assembly of some kind. I shall hear first that it was at this place, then at that, then at a third. I shall be told that it was merely a gathering of a half a dozen malcontents, then that it was an

assembly of a thousand tribesmen. I shall ask the chiefs—they will plead ignorance. As to who attended, what was talked about—of that I shall hear nothing. Nothing at all.”

“If there was a spider who sat at the centre of his web and caught no flies, he would die of starvation,” Zuckermann observed, and his tone was chilly. “But there is no such creature. The hungry spider spins a new web.”

“Very well! It is perhaps time that there was a different spider.” Rivière spoke with a controlled rage. “I tell you, I am sick of Lua-la, sick of the feelings that I live in a world of shadows, of secrets, of intrigue, sick of the heat and the disputes that never finish and the bush that never ends and the papers that never cease to come from Brazzaville! Sick of the living on goat meat and tinned vegetables and stale biscuits. I’ve had—”

“You are overworked, and need a vacation,” Zuckermann said flintily, and his voice acted like a brake.

I intervened with a question that had been bothering me for some time. Why Lua-la? Why such an out-of-the-way place for a sort of nationalists’ convention, if that was what it was to be? Nairobi, Salisbury, Stanleyville, Kampala, Khar-toum—almost any of those centres would surely be a great deal more convenient and accessible. I put this point to Rivière, and though he couldn’t give much of an answer it had the effect of distracting him from his woes.

“Probably because of Roland,” he suggested. “He has good reasons to come here and no one keeps an eye on him or follows his movements. In the cities there are police informers, pass laws, obstacles of that sort.” Another thought then struck him, for he added, “There is something else. You have heard of the Bamili Rock?”

Zuckermann shook his head.

“It is a sacred rock, the home of what on the West Coast they would call a fetish. We do not call them that here, but

we have them all the same—it is a place full of magic with legends attached to it. There is a spring where the first man is supposed to have come out of the earth and whose waters will cure sickness and confer immunity from wounds caused by iron. Sacrifices are made there at times of drought or famine, or any other threat.”

“There are many such places in Africa,” Zuckermann said. “They are of local significance. They would scarcely be known to the sophisticates of Cairo or Nairobi.”

“They could be exploited by them.”

“I hardly think the existence of this sacred rock you speak of would be a sufficient reason for selecting Luala as a *venue*.”

“Bamili Rock is well-known among the pagans,” Rivière persisted. Both these two are obstinate. “And even the most sophisticated are believers in magic to a certain extent—in the possibility that objects and places can be charged, as it were, with some occult power, just as a piece of metal can be charged with magnetism, or a cloud with electricity.”

“You make it sound so reasonable,” Zuckermann said, smiling for once, “that I could almost believe in it myself.”

“Why not? Men of greater intellect than myself, at any rate, have believed in forces beyond the immediate grasp of reason. And what do we know of magnetism or electricity? Are they in essence any less mysterious than these occult forces we apprehend but cannot explain? To go back to this Bamili Rock, it is a place of pilgrimage among these pagans, they go there expecting revelations and miracles. Here, of course, I merely speculate; but it could be that, if there is to be such a meeting, the reputation of this rock could be employed by these sophisticated leaders we have spoken of to attract the credulous and to prepare their minds for some revelation—to put them into a frame of mind, in fact, where

they will do as they are told, and hear the voice of spirits through the mouths of politicians."

"Bravo," Zuckermann said. "That at least sounds logical. But we have only the word of Mr. Colquhoun that there is to be a meeting at all."

"I'd lay odds on it," I said.

Zuckermann, recalling his duties as a host, offered me a drink. I had a beer and escaped as soon as I could, anxious to find Gemma. I had come to see her, and had been landed instead with this long, fruitless discussion, and now she had disappeared. The evening was a total loss so far as I was concerned. And, even at the last moment, Zuckermann frustrated me.

"My driver will take you back to Dr. Clausen's," he said.

"Thank you, but I'd rather walk."

"That would be inadvisable. You might lose the way."

I took my leave, still resolved to look for Gemma. A steward was waiting with a lamp just outside. He led me to the car, and there was its driver standing beside the open door. I simply lacked the nerve to walk off into the darkness or even to say, "Thank you, I don't want the car." I began to realize the formidable, sunken power of Zuckermann's will.

A sad disappointment. And yet, tonight, several things that puzzled me have become less obscure. Two minor mysteries intrigue me considerably. Why was Clausen so shaken by that running idiot? And why did Gemma panic at that casual, rather trite remark of Rivière's?

Miss Young said this morning, "I can't remember ever having had so many visitors. We're full up. And from almost every country you can think of. A couple of Egyptians came yesterday—I'm afraid they think us rather primitive. I



told them they must look on Luala as a holiday camp. The Doctor's become a veritable magnet. How exciting it all is!"

We breakfasted in the refectory: plenty of fruit (pawpaw, grapefruit, bananas, guavas, grenadillas, all home-grown), porridge with tinned milk, those flat bread-cakes made without yeast and thick dark local honey—no butter, this is tsetse area without cattle. You see all types. I spoke to a fellow from Ruanda-Urundi who said he was training in Stanleyville as a dispenser and had come here on a "*petit vacation*." His ambition is to become a doctor, but he seemed defeatist about achieving it; he said he wouldn't be allowed to leave his job because of its importance.

Why, I asked, had he really come to Luala?

"I have wanted to come for many years. Dr. Clausen is famous, his school is different from any other and I wanted to hear what he has to tell us."

Did the answer come a little pat? "He won't tell you anything of much use in dispensing," I suggested.

My companion laughed. "Who knows what is of use? He is a man of wisdom. Besides, I like to travel. There is much to see."

It struck me that all these people, who are young, have a look of eagerness, of suppressed excitement. They laugh a lot, and sometimes one will throw an arm around another's shoulders. They have a bright look in the eyes and in the air is an indefinable spirit of *camaraderie*.

Miss Young lent me a bicycle and I reached the SMAC resthouse soon after ten, having met on the road Mr. Zuckermann, whose large car smothered me with dust and raised my spirits, since I could now hope to find Gemma alone. She was in the office, typing, and welcomed me with a frown; her manner was cold and hostile; I felt baffled, angry and hurt. Yesterday she'd seemed pleased when I turned up and by some means I can't put my finger on she'd made

me believe that she was not indifferent. Today all that was changed.

I was very hot from cycling, dripping with sweat and red in the face, no doubt—not very elegant. My shirt and shorts, clean that morning, looked already as if I'd worn them a week. Outside the office the sun came at you with a sort of malignant fury (it doesn't "beat down" here, it beats up, off the baked ground) and that intense, heavy feeling was in the air that comes before the rains, when flies bite with extra vigour. The office was fairly cool and Gemma herself, in green and white (she rather favours white) looked like an iceberg sculptured by the hand of a master. For the first time since we met I was at a loss what to say, and she didn't help me. We exchanged generalities, and then she said I shouldn't have come over while Zuckermann was out. "He'll be angry if he hears, and I've got work to do." Her expression was unsmiling, quite without warmth. "We leave in two days."

"I know. That was why I came over." She said nothing. "Where will you go?"

"Stanleyville, at least for a few days. Next week we go to Broken Hill. Then I suppose it will be Leo, and then some place up in the Chad region. We're building a railway there."

"Not much home life," I suggested, "for Zuckermann—or for you."

"Zuk has a home and family in Bruges. Everything is well organized."

"And you?"

"I don't want to settle down."

"I wonder if one could settle down anywhere on this continent."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Wherever one goes, one runs into trouble. It seems as if they won't rest until they turf us out."

"Us?"

"We Europeans."

"I'm not a European. I was born and belong here and I can't be turfed out as I've nowhere else to go."

"They won't stop to consider that, I'm afraid."

Gemma got up so abruptly that she jerked the table and almost upset her chair. "For heaven's sake let's talk about something else, if we must talk at all. Everything seems to go back to politics these days."

I said, "Yes, the conversation's going wrong from my point of view also. D'you think I could have a cooling drink on Mr. Zuckermann?"

Gemma walked to the door to call a steward. It's a peculiarity of African houses that, however well-equipped, they never seem to have bells, or means other than the human voice, of summoning the abundant help. Perhaps they want to be sure the voice chords don't atrophy, as leg muscles may—not that I'd say there was the least danger. If Africa goes down, it will go down talking. I persuaded Gemma to leave the office for a few minutes and drink an orange squash with me in the living room, which did have comfortable chairs, and freed me from the feeling that I was an office boy come to be interviewed.

It's amazing how people can change: or rather, how they can present to you a completely different facet, like some precious stone that can be dull and dark or can flash brilliance back into your eyes. Even when I met Gemma at Mrs. Ogilbie's, she kept between us a prickly hedge of reserve, but at least she wasn't hostile and I imagined—perhaps this was conceit?—that she was moved by a little of the attraction that mastered me. Something, at least, was there. Today, nothing—no, less than that—antagonism, a bitterness that made her deliberately cruel. I was crumpled and sweaty, she went out of her way to make me feel boorish; she made it clear

that I was holding up her work; and then she attacked Clausen. Of course she has every right to do so, but that wasn't the reason, she was trying to get at me.

"He's such a bogus old man," she said.

I didn't in the least want to talk about Clausen, but she added, "There's all this build-up about his influence over Africans, but if you ask me I think they've got him in their pocket."

"What do you mean?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "They're a lot cleverer than you think."

"Not than I think. I know they're clever. Dr. Roland especially."

At this Gemma jumped up from the chair on which she'd perched rather than sat and made for the door, like a cat so greatly alarmed by some noise that it will leap away with its legs stiff and its hair standing on end. At the door she turned and positively attacked me: why had I come all this way to Luala? What was I after? Why didn't I keep my nose out of things? Nonplussed, I answered that she knew the reason perfectly well.

"No one believes that! You should have thought up a better story."

I suppose I'm simple-minded, but it hadn't occurred to me that anyone had seriously questioned my reasons for going to Luala, or, indeed, taken any interest in the matter. If you've spoken the truth, you don't pause to think how unlikely it may sound—much more unlikely than a lie to which you've given some care and ingenuity.

"There wasn't any need to think up a story," I said. "It's true, that's all."

"Zuk doesn't think so."

"What the hell do I care what Zuk thinks?"

Yet the anger which was starting to prickle in my throat

was checked by a movement, a look in her eyes. A look of sadness, perhaps, or bewilderment, hard to describe. A look almost of age and hopelessness, queer in a girl of her youth and charm. Standing as if at bay, she said, "I wish I knew which side you were on!"

I laughed—the situation suddenly struck me as comic; I'm blundering about on the edge (as I can now begin to apprehend) of great events or forces in so much innocence that no one can believe I'm not embroiled; the world has reached a point of tension where the uncommitted man, the looker-on, is an anachronism. Here I am, a sort of dodo from another age, and thirty years old. Comic; and sad.

I went over to Gemma and tried to explain all this. I told her that I really was a free agent and that I'd come to say good-bye because, as things were going at present, we might never meet again, and so we should be fools to quarrel and leave a sour memory instead of a happy one.

She interrupted: "What's the use of memories? It's a waste of time to bother with them. If you're going around collecting memories like an old woman gathering wild flowers to press in an album, you can leave me out—unplucked."

That did sting me, as she'd intended. "Why do you have to be so bloody-minded?" I asked; she retorted by asking why I didn't let her alone; she got her way, and we quarrelled. Why didn't I walk out then and there and finish off everything there was to finish, which wasn't much? Instead, I tried to wound her in return and to my shame I succeeded. She turned to go and, with a gesture of dejection that went straight to my heart, she gripped the doorpost with one hand as if for support. Her thin fingers looked so fragile and taut, the gesture was such a desperate, ineffective one against a world so indifferent, that all the unfair things she'd said went out of my head and I took her in my arms and kissed her, and all the stiffness melted away.

How can one write about these moments, in our day and age? Even if you're a genius with words, it's all been said many times and long ago. But though the words are stale, the reality's as fresh as on the day that Adam first looked at Eve, and as enthralling; we loved each other and all our petty differences crumbled into air. Or so it seems now. Why does one keep repeating one's idiotic mistakes? Or is this the one occasion when it *isn't* a mistake? Or am I just a fool to go on expecting one day to gobble an alluring bait that hasn't got a vicious hook wrapped up in it? At any rate it was very wonderful but didn't last nearly long enough. A footstep on the veranda startled us and Gemma jumped away thinking, no doubt, that it was Zuckermann, but in came Rivière, walking swiftly in the brief tight shorts that Frenchmen wear, his lean cadaverous face concentrated in a frown and a cigarette between his lips, a file tucked under one arm.

I saw the scene suddenly like a photograph that I shall always remember: Rivière coming in out of the sunlight framed by the posts of the veranda, poles with the bark stripped off and rubbed smooth and shiny; rough grass beyond with two young oleander bushes and a car (Roland's) standing in the shade; an African woman wrapped in a blue cloth printed all over with yellow tennis racquets walking towards the kitchen with a big load of yams and plantains on her head and a live, scrawny hen dangling upside down in one hand; a smell of earth and smoke and heat in the background and, in my nostrils, the tang of Gemma's hair and powder, the taste of her lips still on mine; and then Rivière's entry, and the shattering of a moment that can never return.

Rivière put his file on the table and spoke to Gemma in French; it was something to do with the new clinic. I didn't listen, but Rivière, out of politeness, started to explain to me.

"It's always the same. You try to set aside a half-hectare from this endless bush for their own benefit—a school or hos-

pital—and they suspect you're trying to take the whole continent for an army of *colons*. Mistrust, suspicion, intrigue, all day long, day after day, year after year."

"You can't exactly blame them," I said.

He laughed. "Praise and blame are for God to dispense. I merely deal with the consequences."

When he'd finished his business with Gemma, I asked him to tell me about the sacred rock he'd mentioned the night before, for the little he had said rather intrigued me.

"I can't tell you much more," Rivière replied. "It's in the forest not very far from my post at Bamili, but the path is difficult and slow. When you reach it there's an ordinary rock, quite large and somewhat red in colour—iron oxide perhaps. There's a spring at the foot, a small one. I could see nothing remarkable, but I didn't stay long, and I had trouble to find a guide. They don't like it, these local people, they are afraid, nothing would persuade them to stay in that part of the forest after dark."

I said that I would like to see it, and asked him the best way to go.

"You'd better come and stay the night with me and I will try to get you a guide. But you will have a strenuous walk and nothing much to see at the end."

"All the same, I'd like to go."

"Well then—why not come with me now? I shall be starting in less than an hour."

That was impossible: so long as Gemma's here, I shan't leave Luala. Our time is short, so desperately short. And Gemma so changeable. She came with me to the veranda and said, "You'd better go with Rivière. I don't suppose I'll see you again."

"You will," I said. "I'll be here tonight."

"That's out of the question. We're behindhand and I shall have to work late."

"You must stop sometime. I shall be there."

"It's no good, I tell you. Leave me alone."

Now she'd become about as approachable as a porcupine. She can change so quickly that she fills me with despair.

For a moment I thought she was going to relent, but then she looked away and added, "I'm no good to you, Andrew," and went back to Rivière. My God, I was angry! I could have wrung her neck; I've never understood before how easy it would be to kill someone you love. I came back in misery; the sun was malignant, the dust intolerable, the future blank. I went straight to my rondavel and packed my few belongings. I was through with Gemma, with Zuckermann, even with Clausen and the whole outfit and resolved to clear right out, to work my way westwards down to Brazzaville and never see Lua-la again.

Miss Young was in the kitchen, surrounded by a mass of pans and raw materials, her hands and arms coated with dough.

"On top of everything, the cook's drunk," she said. "No one can wake him up, and with all these people here I'm at my wits' end. And more and more keep arriving."

The kitchen hasn't even got a proper range, just a brick oven and a lot of heavy pots that sit on open fires. It was insufferably hot and full of people doing nothing, including a number of children. Steam heavy with the odours of cooking filled the room so thickly that you felt you could have caught it in your hand. There seemed to be no washing-up arrangements, just a tin basin, and when the water had become as dark and glutinous as soup it was emptied on to a flower bed.

"Be a kind friend and see if the bread's ready," she said, indicating an oven, which I opened to be greeted by the fresh, yeasty, appetizing smell of baking. The loaves were golden brown and crisp and made me hungry; already my



anger was dying down and I thought I'd stay for lunch at any rate. Nevertheless I told her that I'd come to say good-bye.

"But you've only just come," she said. "Have you seen the Doctor?"

I had to admit that I had not. She stood back from the heaped-up table and looked at me, bringing her mind to bear on this new problem; she was flushed and bedraggled, her hair almost standing on end, her glasses kept misting over and little rivulets of sweat ran down the side of her nose.

"Surely you must see him first?" she said. "He's fallen in with your suggestion about writing his life, much to my surprise—he said he was going to look up some journals and papers for you. I don't know what he'll think of such a sudden change of plan."

She looked so distressed, and put my proposal in such a light, that I felt ashamed of my outburst and recognized it for what it was—merely pique. I said I'd only meant that I was going to stay with Rivière for a couple of days. She looked relieved and asked, hesitantly, and speaking of a favour, whether I couldn't put it off. And then, abandoning the turmoil of the kitchen, she put her skinny fingers on my arm and led me away a short distance to the shade of a tree.

"It would take a great weight off my mind if you could stay here for the next few days. I don't know why, but I feel I can trust you and there's something going on. . . . Of course I've no right to ask you . . . I suppose the imagination of a rather silly woman not as young as she was— It's the Doctor I'm thinking of, he seems so worried, and it did him so much good to talk to you about the past. . . ."

She was twisting a bracelet with fingers stained from work and thickened by rheumatism, and a brooch pinned to her print dress above a flat bosom was crooked. It was a paste-and-enamel butterfly given her, I'm sure, when she was a girl;

it spoke quietly but plainly of Aunt Mary and a house behind a laurel hedge with a square of damp lawn, a fir tree, a clean doorstep and chocolate-painted hall with a grandfather clock and an umbrella stand. She's a fish not so much out of water as in the wrong lake. I said I'd do anything I could, and put off my visit to Rivière if it helped, but of what use could I be?

"It's just having someone here from outside who appreciates what the Doctor is doing, someone with a level head. . . . He might talk to you. I know he's worried."

"There seem to be a lot of newcomers. Perhaps it's too much for him."

She shook her head. "It's not that. I may be wrong—I expect I *am* wrong—and it's not for me to say. But I'll tell you . . . I think the Doctor is afraid."

She brought this out with a rush, mumbling the words, as if alarmed at her own temerity in exposing to the daylight thoughts, or suspicions, born in the dark. She added, "He's afraid of certain people, I think."

"Well, since you mention it, I thought he seemed, for some extraordinary reason, to be afraid of that idiot who caught hold of him the other day."

"You noticed that?"

"It could have been my imagination."

"That's the worst of it, one never knows what's imagination and what's real. Sometimes I get quite dizzy trying to make up my mind. The two don't seem properly separated." She spoke plaintively, affronted by this failure on the part of life to live up to its obligations, and looked helplessly puzzled. "That poor half-wit, now, I can't make him out at all. Do you know what Xenophon said?" I shook my head. "When I asked him whether we couldn't take the creature back to his family, he said such a peculiar thing. 'That man,'

he said, and you know how they roll their eyes when they're frightened or excited, 'that man—he was raised from the dead!' I was quite shocked, I told him not to be profane. Then he looked frightened and almost ran away from me and wouldn't speak about the matter again. Xenophon, of all people! I do so depend on him."

"It's probably some local superstition." I tried to sound soothing. "I'll speak to the Doctor, anyway. I wouldn't worry."

"You're very kind," she said, pressing my hand and smiling in a trusting way that made me feel horribly inadequate.

"Heavens, I must get back to my kitchen. It's only that—I'm sure that you—" She's one of those who can't, for shyness, finish off a conversation tidily.

So I came back to my rondavel and unpacked. I've been silly, but tonight I shall have it out with Gemma and try to get to the bottom of her maddening, contradictory attitude. She must make up her mind.

If Miss Young's in the wrong lake, I'm a lake fish far out to sea. At present I feel sure of only three things: (1) There's to be a meeting quite soon, a sort of undercover nationalists' convention, in or near Luala; (2) Clausen and his show are being used as a convenient cover for these activities; (3) Roland and James Gichini (in a relatively minor rôle) are involved and Roland is almost certainly the leader. Beyond these fixed points lie nothing but ambiguities. A thicket of conundrums. And above all, for me, the riddle of Gemma. I can see no reason why the intrigues of Roland and the nationalists, even if she knows much about them, should worry her. It's more likely to be something personal. Since she came to Luala I think she's seen, or heard, or in some way apprehended a fact or situation that fills her with despair. There was some mystery about her even before she came to

Luala: is there a connection? Can I persuade her to tell me? There's no time to wear down resistance; shock tactics are the only hope. I shall try my luck tonight.

We had a thunderstorm this afternoon, a prelude to the rains. How fast these storms come up and how savagely they strike! At one moment it was all sunshine, heavy and torpid; the very flies seemed lethargic but vicious; the distant hills below us stood out with a hard, vivid purple, sharp in outline, no longer misty with haze. Then black mountains of cloud gathered together, there was a grumble and mutter from beyond the hills and the sun vanished almost with the speed of an eclipse. Everything became dark and lowering, the wind got up and shook the fragile roofs of thatch and drove dust-swirls before it; grasses bent, trees creaked as if an avenging spirit had passed by. There's something personal, vindictive, inexorable about these tropic storms, as if a great mindless beast was out for your blood. And it's *your* blood, you personally, not just anyone who happens to be there.

I took cover in my hut just in time and then the rain came down like a solid wall of water. I thought it would bash in the roof, the runoff from the overhanging eaves formed a liquid sheet between me and the outside world. A distant drumming, which at first I couldn't place, came from the rain's frenzy as it hurled itself against the corrugated iron roofs of the refectory and Clausen's quarters. Inside, you couldn't have made yourself heard.

And then it stopped as if someone had turned off a tap. One thing or the other—none of the intermediate, indeterminate greyness, that rain and not-rain, that sun which shines and yet doesn't shine, those half-measures generally of which

English climate and English character are compounded. Contrasts, extremes, blazing sun, drenching torrent, sandy waste and dense forest—it's all clear-cut, violent, excessive. These extremes build up a tension in the air. For those to whom it's a natural environment our fluffy English middle way, our queer compound of reason and emotion, boldness and sloth, resolution and slackness, severity and mildness, will never cease to be an "alien mystery."

The storm went on its way, the sun emerged, everything steamed and clouds of winged termites emerged from the ground, flew around and then shed their wings. After the rain, the world smelt wonderfully fresh and earthy. You could almost see the grass begin to grow under your eyes.

I met Xenophon, who said, "The rains will come in three days, with the new moon. We say this storm is like the dog who runs ahead of his master."

"Perhaps that will put an end to your visitors," I suggested.

"Yes, finish—no more come now. Soon, in a week, two weeks, they will be gone like cattle when the river is dry."

He sounded pleased at the idea, and I didn't wonder. He looks thin with work and worry, he seems to take his responsibilities more seriously than most.

It was after nine o'clock when I reached the SMAC rest-house on a borrowed bicycle with indifferent lights. The road had dried considerably but the surface was sticky and dangerous. Gemma was in her office and still working; light streamed out of the open doorways and I couldn't get to her without passing the living room. So I had no choice but to go boldly in. There was Zuckermann, and someone with him—Dr. Roland. They were sitting at a central table covered with plans. Zuckermann looked up and frowned.

"You have something urgent to say to me, Mr. Colquhoun?"

I thought it wiser to admit straight out that I had come to see Gemma. He looked at his watch.

"You can see her in fifteen minutes. But please do not stay. We leave tomorrow morning."

"I won't keep her long."

"Then you may wait here until she has finished the piece of work on which she is engaged. Please do have a cigar."

I felt annoyed at being treated like the office boy and refused a cigar. But I suppose he was justified. Having made up his mind not to kick me out, he thawed and showed me the plans he and Roland had been working on. They were ambitious, occupying three sides of a square: on one side the clinic and laboratories, in the centre a library, common rooms and dining hall, in the other wing offices and a lecture hall. And beyond that, on a natural slope, a sort of Greek theatre which would be Dr. Clausen's open-air discussion-centre, flanked by gardens with trees and shrubs where people were to saunter and, presumably, be visited by great thoughts and splendid dreams.

"Put them all in togas and you won't know them from the countrymen of Pericles," I remarked.

"It is a mark of small minds to deride large projects," Zuckermann said acidly.

"This will come about stage by stage," Roland said soothingly. He looked handsome, with the lamplight showing up his fine, Arab bones, his dark, clustering, curly hair, his long head and proud expression. He reminded me of one of the Ife bronzes. His caste of feature isn't Negro but Caucasian, but his eyes have that authentic African depth and dark limpidity, that timeless melancholy we read into them by drawing on our own sense of guilt.

"This will be something truly new in Africa," Zuckermann expounded, his voice warm with the advocate's ring. "A centre of learning and good fellowship; but more than that,

a temple of the scientific spirit in the continent of superstition. Like a lighthouse shining from the hidden sandbanks of the sea."

I looked at Roland and asked, "And you are to be the head priest, or the lighthouse-keeper, whichever metaphor Mr. Zuckermann prefers?"

He smiled. "No, I shall be one of the attendants, that's all. This won't be for one man, even for one company: anyone who wishes will come here."

"It's not all philanthropy," Zuckermann added. "My company will use it for the training of our senior African staff in matters broader than technology. Unless we can have men of wider, and I may say steadier, outlook at the top of the ladder, we shall build on sand. But now we've met an obstacle."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Yes—your friend Dr. Clausen." Zuckermann frowned. "He refuses to co-operate." He made nonco-operation sound like a moral crime as well as a practical difficulty. "I offer him the opportunity which few men receive to realize his ideas, to extend his work, and he refuses. He says: 'I do not build with bricks and mortar. I build with patterns of thought in the mind.' Now that may sound very nice, but I think it's affectation." He prodded his cigar at me. "It's a form of conceit. No man should build only for his own lifetime and his own aggrandizement, so that when he goes, nothing will remain. Continuity is part of greatness. If Clausen is to influence the future, he must found a school which will continue to spread his ideas. He must teach others who can teach his principles. A flash in the pan—"

He indicated with a gesture the fate of such phenomena. It's a queer thing about Clausen, you can take everything he does in at least two contrary ways. You can say, with Zuckermann, that to reject this very handsome offer is a form of con-

ceit, or you could say it is a form of humility. You could also say (or surmise) that it's a form of caution, a refusal to become a stooge for big business. Clausen can be cagey. But Zuckermann is genuinely puzzled and hurt.

I turned to Roland, and asked him his opinion of Clausen's attitude. He shrugged his shoulders, and smiled. "Dr. Clausen is a deep man. Perhaps he thinks: in a hundred years, who will occupy these expensive buildings? Black men, white men or brown men? And what will they teach? Or will it not be occupied by men at all but by insects and bats?"

"The lion and the lizard keep the courts. . . ."

"Or the mole, that burrows deep and multiplies."

He spoke with a conviction, almost a fervour, that impressed these few words on my mind. He had taken from his pocket a small chunk of wood and a penknife and had started to nick away at it with deft, quick movements as I remembered he'd done in the resthouse on our way to Lua-la.

Unexpectedly, Zuckermann said, "Mr. Colquhoun thinks you are a dangerous nationalist, Roland."

But Roland was not caught off guard.

"So I am," he agreed. "We are all nationalists nowadays, and all men are dangerous except for a few minutes after they've made love or filled their bellies."

"Mr. Zuckermann misquotes me," I said. "I don't think it's dangerous in a hostile sense. I sympathize with nationalism."

"It's a European religion, not an African one," Roland remarked. "You teach it to us and are then surprised because we learn so readily. We are quick learners."

Roland was shaping his bit of wood with such speed and skill that I asked him where he'd learnt his carving. He said that when he'd lived in Paris one of his friends had been a sculptor, and they had taken lessons together.



"You have a natural gift," I said.

"It is part of my heritage. My father was an artist. Not in wood, but in rhythm."

"A musician?"

"A dancer, too. He could make poetry with his limbs. The missionaries educated him, he was intelligent and they wished to make him a priest. They sent him to a seminary in France. Then came a struggle between rhythm and prayer, and the devil won. Or so my mother told me many years later. He met my mother there, she was not an African but a half-caste as you call them. But they were happy. So, you see, I have a very strange collection of genes."

"I've never heard you say so much about yourself before," remarked Zuckermann.

"I went to your country once," Roland continued, looking at me. "I spent a winter in London."

"Not mine," I protested. "The country of my conquerors."

He smiled. "Well, you have been assimilated. It was wet and cold and horrible, I was poor and lived like the moles we were speaking of, underground. If I put my hand upon the wall, it came away as moist and cold as the hand of a corpse. I wondered sometimes if I had died and entered the place that lies between this world and the country of the dead. That was because I was hungry. I fell in love while I was there—or perhaps I realized first who it was I loved, and ever since I have been faithful. I have a constant heart. That seems to surprise you."

Indeed, Zuckermann was as near to betraying surprise as, I suspect, he ever came. It was obvious that Roland was talking out of character. He surprised even me, and I scarcely knew him. He seemed, too, strangely excited, his eyes gleamed and when he spoke of love he gave a contrary impression of anger, even of cruelty.

"A romantic story," Zuckermann commented.

"Oh, it was." Roland put away his knife and placed the object he had been carving on the table. It was small, squat and chubby. I took it in my hand: a mole, only about two inches long and light as a wafer. The lines were very simple; just a snout, a curved back, the suggestions of feet, but it had in it the essence of mole-ness, the sense of burrowing. This was a carver's parlour-trick, and he did it in a masterly fashion.

*La petite taupe*, I thought; those were the words James had used. *La petite taupe sait passer au dessous*. "Why a mole?"

"Why not?" He tapped the plans. "We put up these great buildings but underneath the moles burrow and one day, perhaps, they'll dig and dig until it all falls down."

"An emblem of destruction," Zuckermann said, and started to roll up the plans. Roland reached out to pick up his mole but I was just before him and took it over to the lamp to examine it more closely.

"One can set traps," I suggested.

"Moles aren't without intelligence. May I have it back, please?"

"I'll gladly buy it off you," I said.

"I'm sorry, my work is not for sale."

"Then let me keep it as another souvenir, to match the gerenuk."

"I'll make you something more suitable," he said, holding out his hand. "That's a stupid thing—a doodle."

I put it in my pocket, and said, "It will remind me of our conversation."

He had risen to his feet and looked at me in a way which I must admit frightened me. This was not a man to cross, even on a small matter; his face was set and hard, as if cast in bronze, a mask of cold anger; but crossed him I had, and I meant to stand my ground. Of course it was bad manners,

but the mole was in my pocket and now I knew for certain that it had some significance. If we had been alone I really believe he'd have run a knife into me as quickly and effectively as he'd have squashed a fly. I was thankful for Zuckermann, who saved the situation by gathering up the plans and saying with a touch of impatience:

"Let him have it, Roland, you can make one in less than ten minutes. Now I must see what is detaining Miss Kreiss."

"I beg your pardon," Roland said stiffly; he bowed in the French manner to Zuckermann and then to me, his face now quite expressionless, wished us good night, and left without more ado.

"He has the gift of singleness of purpose, that man," Zuckermann said.

"So have all fanatics."

"Both you and Rivière appear to know my own staff better than I do, although I have worked with Roland for fifteen years," Zuckermann observed impatiently. "Now I have a few words to say to you about something else. It is about Miss Kreiss. I have no idea of your intensions, but I will tell you two things. First of all, Miss Kreiss is my secretary and although she has only been with me a short while I am satisfied with her work. She is bound by contract to serve the company for two years and I shall not release her from that bond. If she should break it, there are heavy financial penalties."

"That's very interesting, but I don't see—"

"The second point is more delicate. Miss Kreiss, you understand, occupies a highly confidential position and before I engaged her I naturally had inquiries made to check on her reliability. I hasten to say that I found nothing wrong: I engaged her. At the same time—"

"I don't want to hear all this. If you must spy on people then keep the results of your snooping—"

But Zuckermann was not to be put off. "I will tell you nothing that you couldn't find out for yourself. But I will tell you this. Miss Kreiss is the daughter of a man who occupied a subordinate but no doubt useful position on the East African railways. I don't know his real name, but it was not Kreiss; he took that from the woman he married, who was the daughter of a German missionary. But it's her father that I wish to speak about. He came—"

I couldn't keep my temper any longer. The insolence of the man! I said I didn't care if Miss Kreiss was the daughter of an Eskimo who'd married a Hottentot and I couldn't see that it was his business or mine. Nothing would stop him. He went on:

"You are a difficult young man to help for his own good. You should remember that while Americans make the best machinery in the world, they also make the worst marriages, and that's because they follow the notion of romantic love to extremes. All extremes are bad, especially that one, which was invented in the middle ages and never intended to apply to marriage at all. Unfortunately, the English have allowed themselves to be swamped by this notion, as by so many other American ideas, with the result—"

"All this has absolutely nothing to do with either of us. I've had enough of it and I'm going."

Zuckermann stopped me by laying a hand on my arm; he has a curiously compelling power to make people listen and, if they depend upon him, no doubt to obey; he also has the strength (which I so much lack) exercised by those who remain unruffled.

"Never despise curiosity, Mr. Colquhoun, often it's the beginning of wisdom. I only say this. Miss Kreiss was engaged to be married not long before she applied for her present position. Her fiancé was an English major, it would have been a good match. The preparations were made and then, at the

very last minute—almost, you might say, at the church door”—He snapped his fingers—“the major defaulted. He ran away.”

So great a wave of anger overcame me that I really did see red, the blood rushed to my head and I would have hit him if he hadn't tightened his grip on my arm so that I had a job to wrench it free. He stepped quickly behind the table and that gave me the necessary time to regain some control. And then I did swear at him, standing there in all his smug, self-satisfied, big-business, pompous, dictatorial certainty and, with all that build-up, telling dirty sneaking tales about a girl behind her back, a girl he had at his mercy. I could only think that he'd tried to get his hands on her and been treated with the contempt he deserved and this was his mean, under-hand way of getting back at her. I started to say this but luckily, no doubt, he cut me short—and even when I was in a howling rage with him, he had this curious authority. He said:

“I see I have made a mistake in trying to help you, that you are still too immature to listen to common sense. You had better go, Mr. Colquhoun, before you say things that you would regret and I would not forgive.”

I did leave, and walked about to cool off in the night air, and watched Gemma go into Zuckermann with a handful of papers and then emerge again, return to her office and, a little later, put out the light. I waited in the darkness until she came down the veranda steps and then I called her name softly so as not to startle her. She'd known I was there, I expect, and her voice was cold when she asked:

“What were you and Zuk quarrelling about? You bel-lowed at him like a bull.”

It was part of his cunning that he had, in spite of my anger, planted questions in my mind, and I had fully intended to ask her outright about this English major; if I

didn't, a damnable curiosity would nag at me. But her direct question silenced me. How could I blurt out: Is it true that your fiancé threw you over? Why did he walk out on you at the church door? And then, all that talk about her father: could I ask her if he'd been a criminal, or a bigamist, or shot as a spy? And if he had, what did it matter? I hadn't the nerve (or callousness) to hurt her by speaking out; and, if I didn't speak out, I couldn't tell her why I'd shouted at Zuckermann.

"He annoyed me," I said.

"Obviously."

"It was about Roland." I said the first thing that came into my head.

"Why?" Her voice was sharp as vinegar and (I thought) stiff with alarm.

Why indeed? Why should Zuckermann and I quarrel about Roland? I floundered.

"Zuckermann thinks he's perfect, and that irritated me." One hand was in a pocket and my fingers touched the little carving, and that gave me an idea.

"And then he practically accused me of stealing. Roland carved this with his penknife. It's just a doodle really, he wanted it back but I hung on to it. That annoyed Zuckermann and afterwards he spoke to me like a pompous school-master and I lost my temper, I'm afraid." I thought I had improvised pretty well.

Gemma took the carving and inspected it in the starlight. Her face was white as paper with caverns for eyes; the bushes around the resthouse, charcoal-coloured, looked like crouching beasts; a flowering shrub had left a trace of sweetness on the air. Everything in starlight looks half-threatening, as though forces just out of reach encircle you and lie in wait for a moment of weakness.

"What is it?" Gemma asked.

"A mole."

"The great Dr. Roland. There's nothing he can't do, is there? One should be proud to know him, I suppose."

She handed it back to me, and to touch her was to receive a mild but infinitely exciting electric shock; my hand tingled, my whole body was disturbed.

"If he wants it back you'd better let him have it," she said. "I'd just as soon offend a crocodile."

I've always respected the phrase "something inside me snapped" for its elasticity. It covers everything from shop-lifting in the imitation jewelry to battering in the heads of your family. This time I think it happened to me; at any rate, I've no recollection of what I did or said until I had Gemma in my arms and wouldn't let her go. After a while she had no wish to, she wanted me as I wanted her. I don't flatter myself that she's fallen in love with me, I think that at this moment she was lonely and needed a man and there I was, a more than willing one.

At first she did try to hold back but I paid no attention, in fact I behaved like a cad. Yet I think that at the bottom of her heart that was how she wanted me to behave and that my conquest was like that of an army invading a country whose people have lost faith in their defences. But why argue or analyze? Time for that later, no doubt; Gemma isn't perfect, though at the moment I'm prepared to die in the last ditch fighting for the proposition that she is, and can't imagine why she let me love her as she did, and loved me in return. But there it is—the genuine article; I've walked into jail with my eyes open this time, wrists extended for the silken handcuffs, ready to proclaim them as the finest ornaments in the world.

I stayed until the sky's midnight blue was fading and the starlight indefinably yielding to a stronger power; you can

smell the dawn in these countries, when for a moment the world is grey and still, before the day's golden resurgence. My bicycle, still propped against a tree, was wet with dew; a rainbird was calling with a melancholy persistence, tu-tu-tu-tu in a descending cadence; the sky in the east paled with an astonishing speed as I rode off, and trees, bushes, huts, shrubs appeared as quickly and surprisingly as the objects on bromide paper appear in a bath of developer. The air was wonderfully pure and cool and satisfying, full of aromatic odours impossible to analyze. Lua-la was already astir. Sleepy-eyed boys were beginning to brush verandas with handfuls of large twigs, and women were carrying empty paraffin tins and large black water-pots to the stream.

Just as I reached Clausen's camp, the sun came thrusting up in a blaze of gold and glory over a horizon drawn against the sky as if with charcoal; in a miraculous instant, it flooded all the sky, and long shadows rolled back like a carpet as it topped the distant hills. It was a moment of song and splendour, when the sun took possession of an earth fresh and soft from sleep, and dew lay on all the grass-blades and spider-webs and leaves, like a million tiny beads of crystal, and the cool air quivered with the music of birds.

I cycled up to my rondavel, dismounted and went in. Two things brought me back to earth with a thud. Out of the window I saw a figure squatting by the door of the kitchen, waiting no doubt to be fed. Its hair was long and matted, its clothes were in tatters and it was kneading the earth with its fingers as if mixing dough; the idiot with the scarred throat was back again, the one that had been raised from the dead. I retreated from the window in disgust and also, I'm afraid, in fear; something about him gave me the shivers. And then I noticed that I'd had a visitor. I mean a searcher; my few possessions had been strewn about and even the bed dis-



turbed. Well, they'd found nothing, as all the money I own was in my pockets. But the unknown intruder had left a signature. A dead mole lying by the door.

This morning, for a long time, I sat and watched a sunbird hovering over a bed of flowers—pentstemons, I think. He thrust his thin, curved, black beak deep into the cup of each flower, his glossy wings vibrating in the sunshine with incredible speed, as if dynamo-driven. He never seemed to tire of the game and flitted from one flower to the next with precision and a nimble gaiety. Everything seemed again peaceful and guileless. People shouted across the compound and laughter flickered in the air. Three children walked past my door with head-loads of bananas and yams. They approached the kitchen; a mongrel dog ran out barking and put them to flight; they dropped their loads and the green bananas tumbled on to the grass. They fled screeching; the dog yapped; people emerged from the kitchen and picked up the bananas, almost staggering with mirth. The children timidly returned, making short advances and then pausing to gather courage for another onslaught. But the dog had wandered off elsewhere and they were able to make a last short burst of speed and gain the kitchen's shelter. If only the bananas had been eggs, what bliss for the onlookers!

I can concentrate on nothing today—think of nothing but Gemma. There's so much to do and say and now she's vanished with the ponderous Zuckermann. They were to start early for Stanleyville. And then? Servants of SMAC may go anywhere. When I tried to make some plan she was evasive. It was no time to talk of dates and plan meetings, but we promised to write. Useless! Paper, ink, words—all futile when it's a warm, breathing body that you want in your arms.

Does she feel the same? I thought so, last night—but this morning? Why did she hedge? Surely not just to tantalize, it's something deeper. She has been injured harshly—by this major who walked out on her, I suppose. An injury that's left her raw and tender and she won't risk being hurt again. That's a sufficient explanation: and yet I can't feel satisfied. She has a nature loving, passionate and generous, yet she keeps it buttoned up and battened down under hatches. The injury, perhaps—yet wouldn't injured pride make a woman apply the devotion of a new lover like ointment to the wound?

Would it? How little one knows, even about Gemma—especially about her. Each one of us is like a man in a bathysphere, bumping in his tight-sealed iron bubble about an uncharted ocean-bed and looking through an inspection panel at queer shapes swimming by: big shark and waving octopus, shoals of little darting fishes, clams clinging to a silty bottom—all different, all mysterious, all forever out of reach.

And then, on a practical level, I must face the fact that I'm not much of a catch. Money, property, security, nil. So far, I've taken pride in that. A rolling stone doesn't roll if it's cluttered up with moss. I think fundamentally I'm right—travel, drift, look, ask, wonder until you're thirty or even thirty-five, laying in a stock of experience like a squirrel against the winter, and then begin to use your raw material. Of course, you get left far behind in the race for power and position, for safe jobs and promotion and holidays with pay. All that doesn't worry me. I'm not ambitious.

Now I'm visited by doubts. Did I really make a free, honest choice, or did I evade responsibility? Did I deliberately renounce the daily-breader's existence, or did I rationalize my own failure to measure up to the requirements of a daily-breader? In fact did I run towards something or run away?

A muddle! A world of shadows, with no black, no white, only an infinity of grey.

All this, I suppose, because I'm in love with Gemma. If a man marries he must offer a home. I can't offer this, or even a settled job. So I can't marry: nor do I want to, for its own sake; nor, apparently, does Gemma. This should be simple, but it isn't. Marriage or no marriage, I want to be with her and I can't trail around after Zuckermann nor she drift about the world with me. The conclusion is clear. I must hurry on with this biography of Clausen and get it done. Then I shall at least have something solid to my credit and be free to go to Stanleyville and work out a plan. This is a hard decision but it's the only one.

Clausen. What an enigma the man is. I couldn't nail him down until the late afternoon. Miss Young said he was "a trifle indisposed"—bringing to mind the vapours, when the trouble's more likely to be an upsurge of malaria or the onset of bilharzia, something altogether less *convenable*. Poor Miss Young! She tries to surround herself with a nimbus of Tunbridge Wells: a cut-glass vase of Barbeton daisies on her desk, a leather-framed photograph of a young couple with a baby, a bag of needlework, a blue-and-gold spectacle case bought in Florence, a fresh cotton blouse every day. She sighed and said, "Sometimes I do feel that perhaps I need a holiday. I find myself getting snappy with the servants and if there's one thing I hate it's a snappy old woman fussing over details. They're all so sordid . . . yet one has to feed people. I sometimes wish the Doctor—" Loyalty checked her incipient complaint.

Clausen looked all right when I did corner him, though (imagination again?) a bit on edge, a bit strained. The little

cobweb lines all around the keen blue eyes give his face a mariner's patina. I thought what a perfect television star he'd make, and then he speaks so incisively, with a deep voice and bluff accent that add flavour.

We talked about the scientific papers he'd given me to read. Some were beyond me, and he explained them so well that I thought I understood them, even if I didn't. After a while I asked him straight out the crucial question that I don't think he's ever answered: why did he give up his scientific career and retreat into Africa?

I said that he'd explained it partly—that Africa had something to offer, a closer relationship with the elements of life and perhaps a better understanding of the fundamentals of living. But that wasn't enough. He'd had this high position. He could have used it to do even bigger things in the world. There must, I said, be something personal that had driven him to Lua-la.

Clausen said, "You have asked me a very personal question but you have not given me any reason why I should answer it."

"You agreed that I should write your life. How can I do it without the most important facts?"

"You're dealing not with facts but with motives, something quite different. And you ask a question I cannot answer. Who can analyze his motives? They blow him as the wind does, this way and that. What made you come here to Lua-la to write this book?"

"You know that. I came because I admire you, your career and your philosophy."

"That's the surface reason. Reasons are like onions, you peel one skin and there is always another underneath."

"You mean that I want to build a reputation and to make money out of the book? I think that's true partly, but I don't

think it was the main reason. Although that might be hypocrisy."

"Well, you see," Clausen said, smiling at me, and there was a lot of charm in his smile, "even your own motives are a mystery to you. Behind those motives which hang like an arras on the wall there may be others which you scarcely suspect."

It seemed to me that he was making a lot of mystery out of something quite simple and straightforward and I said so: of course there are always Freudian and other psychological skeletons behind the arras, but was there any need to worry about these? Or did he think that some aspect of my weaning and suckling treatment had brought me here?

Clausen smiled, and disavowed a Freudian approach. "I meant only that a young man who travels so far as this with so slender a reason is a pilgrim, and all pilgrims look for the same thing."

"Certainty," I suggested.

"And escape. So I suggest that you came here seeking to escape from something in yourself—a sense of failure, perhaps, an injury, a false position you cannot blame wholly on others. And perhaps it's this instinct to escape that drives you on, as it drives a sick animal from the herd—like most of our instincts, sound enough, if we would only trust them. So I will help you if I can."

I was silenced. As soon as he spoke I knew that he was right. Anyone could see it and yet I hadn't seen it myself, I suppose because from childhood we are taught to be ashamed of escape. In war people get shot for it (or used to), and even in peacetime it's despised as cowardly. I've accepted this unthinkingly, but is it right? *Is escape cowardly?*

As if echoing my thoughts, Clausen added, "You shouldn't be ashamed of escaping; self-preservation is a law of life, for

the spirit as well as the body; we do ourselves an injury when we defy the laws of life."

"That doctrine would make hay of every battle ever fought."

"Perhaps the world would have been all the better for that." Clausen turned his back to me; somehow he looked sad; I felt that I was bringing back memories he had tried to exclude. Yet this was my opportunity and I couldn't let it go.

"You've told me my own motives, but not yours," I pointed out.

He came back to his desk, sat down with an air of decision and offered me a bull's-eye; he tried to take one himself from the tin but they were stuck together and he had to dig one out, after a struggle, with the butt of his pencil. This childish act reduced him to the stature of a bewildered rather than a master man.

"Mine were the same," he said.

"But you had nothing to escape from. You had success."

"Fears, also. And failures."

I said I'd be grateful if he would indulge my simplicity by becoming less enigmatic.

He replied, "It's too long a story. I can put it briefly only by saying that in the heart of each of us, each modern man, there dwells a little ancient man, a man of superstition, who may be shrivelled and asleep and forgotten, but will come to life at certain times and say to the big modern man—you are going too far, that is enough. Well, it had happened to me that my researches had reached a certain point—I seemed to be on the verge of certain discoveries—when this little ancient man stirred in his sleep and came alive to warn me that I should go no farther. Because it is possible to become too presumptuous. As moral beings, we are not yet ready for knowledge that would make us into gods."

"That's an unusually timid point of view for a scientist," I suggested.

He smiled. "We are not all bold as lions. One day perhaps the human race will be ready to exercise the powers of the Creator; but not yet."

"So you ran away from finding out too much," I said, not really convinced: surely that's out of character for any scientist. "But you could have switched from that line of research to some other. You needn't have come all the way to Africa."

"That's true. Motives are never simple: I told you before, they're like onions. Other things combined—You ask a great many questions."

"My motive is necessity, not idle curiosity."

Clausen laughed and said that I had some at least of the makings of a good scientist myself, a concentration of purpose, even ruthlessness. Then he spoke of one of his early teachers who, in his zeal for research into the virus of the common cold, would accost total strangers in the street or the theatre and beg them for their handkerchiefs, and of the outraged ladies who had delivered him over to the police. He was sliding away from the point and saw that I saw it, and so continued:

"You know that when you study bacterial cultures you isolate each strain and grow it on a sterile medium, separately. Africa's the last region where one can study human cultures, not isolated indeed, that is impossible, but as near to it as one can get. Each culture has developed independently and in places we are just able to see it before the great fungus of the West creeps in and devours it. The spores are germinating quickly, it is only a matter of a few years.

"I study man in culture while there is time. It's an adventure. Where should we be without the sight of new paths opening in front of us into unknown regions? Do you know the words of the great Nansen? Long ago I learnt them by

heart. 'Woe to him who has begun the chase, for he can never give it up! The peaks have been reached: they were so low. The vast expanse seems small and the snow-fields no longer gleam, the mountain tarn is not high nor lonely, and the white swans—they are flown. But once more, yet once more wings can be stretched for one more flight, and then with all their strength beyond the vast expanse, beyond the peaks and the snow-fields—thither none may follow!' Often I have echoed these words."

"The words of a northerner," I said. "I don't think they fit into this scene."

"He also wrote: 'The ceaseless turmoil of cities, the nightmare of money-making, is dwarfing the race. It is from the deserts, from the solitudes, from the elemental depths of nature, that the new men have always come.'"

I looked out of the window and over a peaceful vista by no means devoid of activity. Under a tree lounged a group of Africans discussing some topic in desultory fashion, for the siesta spirit lay over the land. The tree's branches were full of nests as round as tennis balls but their builders, too, seemed to be resting. Some goats herded by a small boy grazed in the distance, and a gardener was leaning on his hoe, apparently dozing, beside a bed of scarlet salvias.

The scene could not have been more peaceful but it was scarcely elemental. One of the deserts and solitudes? I'd imagined Luala to be a lonely spot at the back of beyond where Clausen lived a hermit's life of comfortless austerity. Of course it's isolated but, if you come to think of it, materially he's better off than he would be in the average university town at home. Plenty of domestic help, fresh food, warmth and sunshine, admiring students, a stream of visitors; no stoking boilers or standing in bus queues on cold wet nights or trying to keep down bills for electricity. Not that I



blame him in the least, of course, it's just a fact; but—did he really make a *sacrifice* in coming here? There's his reputation: but surely his move to Luala has enhanced it rather than the reverse; an oracular aura has gathered around his head. Again, a fact not of his seeking, but one that redounds to his advantage.

I don't know whether my face betrays my feelings very easily, or whether Clausen is especially sensitive to people's thoughts and changes of mood. He, too, glanced out of the window and smiled.

"I must admit that this does not appear to be a solitude. I meant it in a spiritual sense, but even then . . . Luala has changed since I settled here. These young men insist on coming, I don't invite them, but they come, and so my hermitage has turned into a terminus."

"Just why *do* they come?"

Clausen looked surprised. "You've seen for yourself. There's a great thirst for knowledge and for a deeper understanding of the forces at work in the world."

"There's a great thirst for power and technique."

"You can't have power without knowledge."

"Yes, but knowledge of what? They want knowledge of how to run things. And, I suppose, how to run each other."

"You're close to the mark there." Clausen rose and walked to the window; he didn't like the turn the conversation had taken, and of course I was being not exactly disrespectful, but audacious. Funnily enough, for the first time I felt there was something not quite right, not quite genuine and sincere, about Clausen. His tone had a certain note—false would be too strong a word: almost as if he were rehearsing a lesson. He added, half to himself, "You are right if you think that matters have not fallen out as I intended. . . ."

"I'm sorry if I've asked too many questions."

"I gave you that privilege when I consented to your project," Clausen replied handsomely, and in a voice that had regained its resonance. In those few moments at the window he'd recovered his poise, but I had seen for an instant quite a different man, one (I believe) bewildered, conscious of failure and even afraid.

"I'm sorry I haven't answered them to your satisfaction," he added. "Questions are the same as motives, always another layer underneath, like the onion skin. I've reminded you that motives are always mixed and I've told you some of mine. There are others. One at least is personal and very private and I've never spoken of it to any living soul."

I had to say, of course, that I hadn't intended to pry into his private life. There's the trouble in a nutshell about writing the biography of a living person. But now, I think, he's made up his mind to trust me a little farther. He took a battered wallet out of a trouser pocket and from it extracted a small object which he handed to me. It was a photograph, about passport size, faded and torn at the edges: a woman with long hair done up in an old-fashioned way in a plait round her head. She looked handsome in a long-faced manner, with fine eyes, but you can't see much in that kind of picture.

"My wife," he said.

I mumbled something incoherent, intended to convey a blend of reverence and sympathy.

"She was ill for a long time," he added. "Mentally ill. She grew to be afraid of me, although I was the only person who could help her. That's often the way. Yes, it was a long illness but it ended finally."

I made no comment, and Clausen put the photograph back in his wallet.

"She committed suicide. After that, for a while, I hadn't

much stomach to continue. Perhaps you can understand how the need for a new start became imperative."

I thanked him for telling me and there was nothing more I could say. He reached for the tin of bull's-eyes and started to poke out another with his pencil, and all at once he seemed no longer a man of almost superhuman stature, but a very human creature confronted, like the meanest of us, with failure, impotence and grief, helpless in the face of other people's separateness and cruelty. Poor Clausen! He's old to make a new start but I suppose that's why he came to Luala—sick at heart, tired of himself and of life and yet hoping to erase a failure of the kind that's indelible. Even Clausen can't call back yesterday.

He grew practical as soon as he'd quarried out his bull's-eye and talked about some work he's doing on his old topic, mosaic disease in potatoes. He has discovered some rare local varieties of the potato family and is testing their immunity; they seem to show an unknown factor of resistance he's eager to investigate. The old scientific spirit isn't dead.

"The answers to more of our questions than we realize may lie here," he said. "We Europeans have come in like bulls in a china shop, smashing everything. One day we shall learn enough sense to stand still and look about us and then, if it isn't too late, we shall see things that we never suspected. . . ."

He grew speculative, his eyes dreamy, his fine voice took on a timbre, a resonance, full of magic—a hint of splendour, a suggestion of space, nobility, freedom. What power lies in a voice! Something to do with rhythm, some forgotten art of working on the blood through the ear known still to skilful drummers, to poets, to actors of the first flight? Is that part of the secret of his influence over Africans? They respond more deeply than we do to these hidden factors, indeed to the central mystery of personality. To be told such things, in

themselves flattering, in that deep, ennobling voice must make their very hearts glow.

I came away feeling that I knew a little more of Clausen, and that there's an infinite amount to know.

I was writing in my rondavel after tea when Xenophon brought me a note. It was from James, and said briefly: "Will you come to see me in Luaala? I have something of importance to say." Xenophon reported that the messenger had returned without waiting for an answer.

Why couldn't James come here to see me? He's in with Roland; Roland for some reason wants his carved mole back again; my room was searched last night. It hardly needs M. Poirot to say how many of those beans make five.

I produced the mole from my pocket and showed it to Xenophon. The effect was gratifying: he stiffened, stared, and then really did roll his eyes.

"What is there about a mole that makes you so afraid?"

"That is dangerous."

"Tell me what you know."

He shook his head. "I know nothing, Monsieur. Nothing at all."

"You know it's dangerous."

He gave me a look I took to be of pity, or at least of sympathy, and hesitated. He was scared and nervous, but he was keeping his head.

"You are a European," he said, "and a stranger; why don't you wash yourself clean of this thing? It can bring you no profit. Go back to your own country, where your feet know the safe paths, and give this thing back to its owner."

"So you know my room was searched."

"It's no business of mine."

"It's the business of the Doctor's," I said, firing a shot in the dark. He shook his head vigorously.

"No, no, it's not his business. But there are men who pull him as if he were a fish on a line. . . ."

"He's a strong fish who can fight back," I suggested.

"Not if Vuko . . ." He stopped abruptly and with an effort took his eyes off the mole. "That is a bad thing and will bring you trouble. Throw it into the bush."

I put it back into my pocket. "Xenophon, I want to ask you something. It's about the idiot who hangs around."

He passed his tongue around his lips and looked as though he'd like to bolt for the door, but had found his feet cemented to the floor.

"Miss Young told me something that you said about him. You said he'd been raised from the dead."

Xenophon nodded.

"What did you mean?"

"It is true."

"Who did it?"

Xenophon hesitated and I thought his lips began to form a word. Then he shook his head.

"I know nothing. I was not there."

"Where did this take place? At Luala?"

He again shook his head. Remembering my talk with Rivière, I fired another shot at random. "Was it at Bamili Rock?"

The name shook him: he stood with his hands at his side and his mouth open, not knowing what to say. One of those living silences followed when every sound falls on the ear with exaggerated clarity; I heard a man shout across the compound to a friend, the liquid voices of two women chattering as they walked past the window, the distant tinkle of a goat-bell and the chaffering of weaverbirds in a tree. Xenophon pulled himself together and gave me another warning.

off: all this was bad and dangerous, I was a stranger and why didn't I go away and leave it alone? I tried again to extract even a scrap of information, but vainly: he'd had time now to set a guard on his tongue. He left looking acutely unhappy.

Xenophon strikes me as one of the few people here you could trust, if you had his confidence. He's devoted to Clausen, and scared to death of some person or persons who are trying to intimidate Clausen and perhaps destroy him. Xenophon used a word I haven't heard before: Vuko. Who, or what? A cult, a society, a man?

I begin, very dimly, to apprehend Clausen's difficulty, or part of it. He sympathizes with the nationalists, I expect, or with their general aims; he thinks highly of Roland; yet he can't condone some of their practices. Mixed up in it all there's a kind of secret society—Vuko may be its name or its leader—whose emblem is the mole. Clausen's tried to stop these practices and as a result incurred powerful enmities. But whose? It's all a game of blind man's buff in the dark.

There's to be this "gathering together" and it must be soon. And I shall be surprised if the gathering-place is not Bamili Rock.

Meanwhile, things have moved, and not very pleasantly. After Xenophon left, I paid a visit to the garden-house (no modern sanitation at Luala, but what's wrong with a pit latrine?), stood on the seat and thrust my wallet and the wooden mole up into the thatch. Roofs are popular places, I believe, for hiding things; people conceal money there and lose their savings when the hut burns down, as huts often do, but I don't see how anyone could find the mole, even if he suspected the place, without demolishing the thatch completely.

Then I cycled down to Luala. There'd been another afternoon storm but the clouds had cleared away and a mellow sun was slanting over the rounded hills and freshened pastures and laying long, long shadows across the grass. Patches of cultivation looked like dark-red gold in the pure sunlight. Everything is ready for the planting season and the gardens are all weeded and dug. Small boys were driving home glossy goats with foolish arched noses, women called out greetings as they bore big black pots of water on their heads. How friendly, cheerful and laughter-loving these people are! Impossible to believe that anything sinister lurks under the surface, that they live, as so many experts tell us, circumscribed by fear.

I found my way to the shop where James is staying. It belongs to a Nubian, a dark, pockmarked man with an Arab caste of features and a fez; he sells the usual assortment of grains and spices and soap and paraffin, matches and combs and tea. He took me to a back veranda screened from the rest of the household by a reed fence. James appeared quite sober on this occasion. He greeted me, as usual, with apparent pleasure and gave me a camp chair to sit on, but no brandy this time. We chatted for a while; he said that he'd been held up for transport but had found a lorry that was going to Juba and expected to start in a few days' time.

"Why don't you come with me?" he suggested.

"I've barely started my work here."

"Will you object if I say something to you frankly and between friends?"

"You don't need to say it. Keep your nose out of things that don't concern you."

James laughed. Outwardly he was as companionable as ever, but his laughter had a sharp edge to it; underneath he was angry, I don't know whether with me or with others.

"You haven't changed, Andrew. If you come to a fallen

tree trunk on the path, you pull out your axe and cut it in two."

"Perhaps I have a simple nature," I agreed. "It saves time."

"I must disagree with you there. You spend all day hacking at the tree trunk when it would be quicker to walk around it. Besides that, you blister your hands."

"Let's stop talking in riddles, and tell me why you want me to clear out of Lua-la."

"My dear Andrew," James said, smooth as butter, "you misunderstand me. Why should I wish you to leave Lua-la? It's a nice place, a little bit too quiet perhaps for me, but quite healthy, plenty of food, and if you wish to stay here and talk to Dr. Clausen why should I try to change your plans? No, no, there is nothing like that." James paused, and I kept silent, waiting for the pay-off.

"But there's another matter which I think you ought to settle—I say this as a friend. I believe you are an honest man?"

"That's a rash assumption to make of anyone."

James laughed as if I had made the wittiest of sallies. "You like to joke with me. As a lawyer I have seen many thieves and felons and you are not one of them. You have the look of honesty."

"So do most confidence men."

"I speak seriously now, Andrew. As a friend. Why don't you return the property you have taken which belongs to another person? I don't think it was given to you. Well, then, if it wasn't a gift, doesn't it still belong to its owner?"

He was getting me into a corner. It was a small thing without value, I said, that I was keeping as a souvenir.

"But the owner didn't give it to you," James repeated. "If you want a souvenir he'll give you something better than that."



I replied that we were wasting time fencing with words; if he'd tell me the real reason, the full reason, why Roland was so anxious to reclaim his mole, I'd at once hand it back.

"I don't think it's for you to make conditions," James said, and he was much less friendly now. "Dr. Roland wants you to return his own property. Isn't that enough?"

"Is that why he had my room turned upside down?"

"You're very obstinate."

"And inquisitive. Both are national characteristics, I'm afraid."

"Dangerous ones, when you meddle in something which is no concern of yours."

"Then you admit there's something to meddle in."

James jumped to his feet and walked across the cramped little veranda and back several times, stung almost to rage.

I added, "And I admit that it's none of my business. To be honest, I'd have given Roland back his mole if he hadn't been so high-handed about it in the first place, and then if he hadn't had my rooms searched. I don't like being bullied into things."

James made impatient noises. "This isn't a game children play with their mothers. If you have any sense, Andrew, you will give me that carving. I repeat this because I want to help you. We've been good friends. Now, be a sensible fellow. . . ." He held out his hand.

If I'd had the mole in my possession I think I would have given it to him then, because he was so obviously sincere and, when all was said and done, it *was* none of my business. But as I hadn't got it on me, I had to refuse. Perhaps I should have promised to surrender it in the morning, but I didn't; I suppose I *am* obstinate; I only said, "I'll tell you frankly, James, I'm curious; that little animal seems to be leading me into queer situations, like Alice's white rabbit; and I rather want to see what's going on at the bottom of the hole."

James said nothing for a moment or two; I think he was mentally washing his hands of me. Then he remarked, "We have a proverb: the singing grasshopper doesn't see the crane overhead."

"But the crane sees him, and gobbles him up—is that it?"

"That's it," James said soberly.

"Well, I have been warned."

Warned, but not enlightened; and that seemed to be the end of it. It's sad that my relationship with James should have petered out into distrust and even enmity. I wanted to say something that would put us back on our old footing, and stood there awkwardly, but nothing came into my head; so I was obliged to bid him good night curtly and leave him sitting in his camp chair.

I went around to the Greek, Christopholis, who keeps a rudimentary garage, to find out whether I could hire a car to go to Rivière's tomorrow. Chris, as everyone calls him—a stoutish, biscuit-coloured man with the look of a pugilist, tattooed forearms and a three days' growth of beard—undertook to hire me a vehicle. By the time we'd finished bargaining over terms it was dark and I set out for home cautiously, the cycle's lamp being practically useless.

You go uphill all the way to reach Clausen's from Luala village. The road, or path really, tacks about through bush which has been partially cleared for cultivation. There are still patches of it left and one or two stretches of open grazing. At one point the track dips down, crosses a log bridge over a small stream and rises again through a kind of thicket. It was very dark here and as I approached I had a premonition that something would happen, but I couldn't go back. And something did. My only warning was a sound of breathing and a simultaneous footfall. All I could do was to drop the bike and put my arm up to cover my face—a futile gesture, but nothing could have averted the sequel. My arms

were seized in a gorilla's grip and I was flung to the ground face-downward. I fell so heavily that I was almost winded, but just had the strength to kick out and land someone a satisfactory crack on the shins; he grunted and that was all I remember, except the blinding pain of a blow on the head.

I was lucky to be knocked out right away, as if I'd struggled my assailants would probably have killed me—they did their best as it was. I'm black and blue all over and the injuries still hurt like hell. They kicked me in the thighs and buttocks and did something to my ribs which makes them feel as if a large steam-roller had danced on them. As for my head, they must have caught it a smashing wallop with a blunt instrument, it ached till I could have cried. It still does. I came around to feel cold water trickling down my neck and to hear a woman's voice tell me to lie still. I tried to sit up because I thought, in my fuddled state, that the voice was Gemma's, but I couldn't make it and flopped back; red-hot irons were jabbing into my skull and a violent wave of nausea swept over me. When I could speak I called out Gemma's name, but the voice said, "No, not Gemma," and I was totally deflated.

I did manage to sit up. I was only just capable of a mild surprise to find that the succouring hands belonged to Elizabeth.

"You stay, I fetch someone," she said. I muttered that it was dangerous for her; James would notice her absence. I told her to go back to Luala, but she said she'd go forward to Clausen's and fetch help from there.

"James has gone out," she added, and her voice was full of contempt for James. "He will come back much later and then he will be drunk."

Elizabeth's hands were remarkably gentle when she bathed me with a damp cloth which she refuelled, so to speak, from the stream; I was lying only a few feet away and could hear

it gurgling softly in the dark. I remembered that she once said she had trained as a nurse.

I asked, "Did you follow me?"

"I heard them speak of what they meant to do. So I come after you."

"Well, it's awfully good of you." I felt absurd, thanking her in those few threadbare words as if I'd been acknowledging an invitation to tea.

"They failed," Elizabeth said, half as a question.

"They did."

"You must give it to them."

"Not now, by God!"

"Yes, give it, or they will kill you."

I must admit that seemed likely, but I didn't feel up to facing the issue at the moment so I said nothing. Elizabeth added, "You must go away from here."

"Let them drive me out?"

"This is a bad place. You leave it."

"Perhaps I will."

"You take me too?" Elizabeth's voice was full of hope—she has a gentle voice like syrup and it seemed to trickle away into the darkness surrounding us. She stopped bathing my forehead and sat there beside me with the repose that never left her, so far as I could see—a tranquil creature and, I now know, kind.

"I must get back to Clausen's quickly," I said.

"You take me with you?" Elizabeth repeated.

"If I do leave Lua, I shan't go back to Nairobi. I shall go the other way."

She gave a sort of grunt, and stirred in the darkness. "You go after her—after Gemma." She pronounced the name in two distinct syllables, emphasizing the second, and it sounded odd but delightful.

"Perhaps. The problem at the moment is to get back to Clausen's camp."

She helped me up—she's strong underneath her softness, but my limbs were stiffening and I could only limp. We were discussing the next move when the lights of a car showed up in the blackness that lay between ourselves and LuaLa. At first they were a glow in the sky behind the ridge but they approached very quickly and we had to decide what to do.

"It is James," Elizabeth said, and now she suddenly lost her nerve. I had my hand on her arm and could feel her tremble.

"Hide in those bushes," I suggested.

"You come too. He will kill you. Quick, you hide."

"James won't kill me now even if it is James. And probably it isn't, but someone who'll take me back to camp."

The headlights of the car had by then thrust long shafts of light over the top of the ridge, throwing trees and bush into sudden and dramatic silhouette; in a moment they would flood over us. Elizabeth gave up the argument and vanished into the bush. A second later I was blinded by the light that hit me like a physical blow. I stood still on the track wondering if this would be salvation or a *coup de grâce*, a stranger or James.

The car drew up beside me; in the reflected light I could see that the driver was dark-skinned and that he wore glasses. Then a voice I recognized said as smoothly as a snake, if snakes could talk, "Have you met with an accident, Mr. Colquhoun?"

It was Dr. Roland. The last man I wanted to see.

"I fell off my bike."

"You fell very thoroughly," he remarked dryly.

"The ground's hard."

Even in my dilapidated state I felt an impulse to hit out

at the man, sitting there so smugly—the instigator of all this, come to see if I was dead or alive. It was a relief to him, no doubt, that I was not dead, this would have been an inconvenient time for awkward questions. I almost wished that I had been, just to spoil his game.

He opened the door and said, "As I happen to be going to Dr. Clausen's I will take you too, and then Miss Young can attend to your bruises."

I had no alternative but to climb in, a very painful process; I supposed that Elizabeth would rescue the bike and take it back to Luala. But I was almost past caring what happened to the bike, to Elizabeth or to myself; I was in the hands of the enemy and powerless to get my own back—for the present. He dropped me near my rondavel and, I suppose, went on to see Clausen; I hobbled across to my hut and lay down. Miss Young appeared presently and clicked her tongue, called Xenophon, brought first-aid equipment and set to work with antiseptics, iodine and plaster. She fussed and dithered—not nearly so soothing as Elizabeth, but she took a lot of trouble and, thanks to her, nothing ought to go septic. I'm not as badly hurt as I thought at first, it's mostly bangs and bruises.

Even Miss Young could see that my injuries hadn't resulted from a simple fall off a bike, and when she and Xenophon had finished she asked me point-blank what had occurred. She looked moist and flushed and more than ever an epitome of everyone's maiden aunt, but there's a tougher fibre to her than one might expect; her mouth can set in a firm line and she's a person one instinctively doesn't lie to. So I told her that I'd been beaten up, but not why. "My money's safe," I added.

"It wasn't money they were after," she said.

"What, then?"

"It's no affair of mine. I'm here to look after the Doctor

and that's all I worry about. It's enough, I assure you. Dr. Roland picked you up, didn't he?"

"Yes. Quite a coincidence."

"That man's an evil genius," she said.

"Then why does Clausen deal with him?"

"Ah, if he'd only send him away!" she cried. "What is it that binds the Doctor to that man? What hold has he got? Roland's far beneath him as—" She stopped in mid-sentence, appalled by the failure of her discretion.

"Are you sure Roland has a hold over him?"

"No, I'm sure of nothing," she said wearily. "I shouldn't have spoken like that, forgive me. I ought to know by now that one should mind one's own business. It's just that the Doctor— Well, the rains are coming, aren't they? After that things get much quieter here, in fact we're quite cut off and left to our own devices. Just now there are too many people. . . . I think after the rains I really will try to get home for a holiday."

"To England?"

"Yes, I live in Bromley. Sometimes it seems very remote. Of course I wouldn't want to leave the Doctor for long. I like to think that he needs me—perhaps even that's a form of conceit. And yet one's day is full. . . . I've got a nephew just leaving school and he'll be going for his military service. I'd like to see him before he disappears for two years, abroad very likely, and perhaps comes back quite changed; sometimes they even marry foreign girls. . . ."

Her voice tailed off, she was trying to direct my attention away from her outburst about Roland, like a hen partridge trailing its wing.

"Why did you come here in the first place?" I asked. "Had you known Dr. Clausen well?"

No, she said, not at all; she'd just come, like others—like myself, for instance, out of the blue. From an early age she'd

set her heart on becoming a missionary, but she'd had to care for ailing parents and by the time her mother died she was too old, and anyway her faith had "broadened," which meant that it had enfolded all the other major religions of the world—ennobling to practise, no doubt, but hard to proselytize. By then Clausen had become a hero to her, a secular saint in the humanist calender. A missionary friend invited her to stay and, greatly daring, Arabella Young had abandoned Bromley for the Congo. An opportunity arose to visit Luala; she took it; was enlisted to help in a somewhat disorganized ménage; found a niche; and stayed. Unpaid, of course. Now she and Xenophon are the props of the place.

"It goes to show," she said. "If you go on hoping, you always get what you want in the end."

Now she's completed the first aid I feel much better, especially since Xenophon brought me a glass of brandy, which I must say I needed. There's something endearing about Xenophon. He's got a quiet, unruffled manner, half-amused and half-melancholy.

I've written up this diary, put on my only good suit and checked my *cache* in the thatch—still there. Xenophon says that food and coffee are on tap in the refectory.

A lively session at first: many new faces and a sense of excitement, of heightened awareness, in the air tonight. People talked with animation, some in French and some in English, for they came from many different countries and have in common only European tongues. I got into conversation with a husky Nyasalander who described with savage irony the mining compounds of Johannesburg, and a tall, thin, hungry-looking fellow from Somaliland talked about Cardiff, where he had worked for several years.



We were interrupted by shouts and commotion from outside and then a lurid light in the sky. The moment I saw the blaze I knew what had happened and I was right, it *was* my rondavel. I sprinted towards it at a speed that Roger Bannister wouldn't have been ashamed of, with only one idea, to save this journal. Nothing else I have is of any value and perhaps this isn't either, but it's got all the raw material, such as it is, that I've managed to collect.

The roof was alight, the heat intense, the roaring of the flames terrifying, but I knew exactly where it was, on the chest of drawers, and nothing had collapsed, though it was on the point of doing so. I took in a deep breath, shut my eyes, put my head down and dived. It was like plunging into hell, but I had no time to think; my rush carried me into the room; all above and around me was red and thick and furious, the noise was like the roaring of a thousand express trains, the stinging smoke forced me to shut my eyes. I blundered forward till I hit an obstruction—a hot obstruction; my hands groped and simply by good fortune they touched and seized the leather-covered book. The smoke scorched my skin and stung my screwed-up eyes and my head was bursting, but I managed to stagger back into the glorious cool air and then collapsed in a prolonged fit of agonized choking. A few moments later there was a series of crashes and the whole roof fell in.

It was a magnificent sight. I could smell my own singed hair and eyebrows and my face was burning but I couldn't help feeling rather pleased with myself. I'd never have thought I could have run so fast after the battering I had earlier on.

This journal is crinkled and scorched, but still intact.

The post-mortem on how the hut caught fire hardly seemed worth while. Various theories were advanced, none of them convincing, everyone chattered and exclaimed and

shrugged. I displayed my trophy rather as a conjuror hands around the empty box for inspection, to demonstrate that it held no concealed moles. For I've no doubt that the destruction of that ill-omened carving was the object of the exercise. Perhaps the mole is laughing quietly to itself in the thatch of the garden-house.

Miss Young was badly ruffled. All the accommodation, she said, was full, there wasn't a corner anywhere, they'd never had such a lot of visitors. In the end it was arranged that I should have a camp bed in the library, which is the best room in the place. This suits me well: I was able to slip away and go to bed early; I must admit I've had enough for one day.

Xenophon brought me a pair of someone else's pajamas. I own nothing now but my suit, a spare shirt and trousers that were at the wash, this journal, my money and that damned mole. Enough, I hope, to get me down to Stanleyville.

I didn't get to sleep after all. I was just dropping off when someone came in and woke me. It was Dr. Clausen. He was very apologetic. I'd noticed that he'd not appeared all evening, in spite of the fire. He'd had no idea that I was sleeping in the library and had come to consult a book. He said that he'd leave it till the morning but of course I urged him to ignore me, and after some argument he took a volume from the shelves and settled down at the table by the light of the pressure lamp.

Perhaps it was this light that made him look so haggard, almost cadaverous, the lines on his face so deep. I was reminded of those macabre medieval effigies of corpses half-devoured by worms, frogs and vermin, demonstrations of the body's corruption. Here was nobility: fine bones, arched

nose, wide forehead—and the indefinable sense of an inner malaise. He was restless, crossing and uncrossing his legs, reading a little with his hand cupping his cheek, torturing a fag-end of string in writhing fingers. I, too, was uneasy, for now my bruises were having their revenge. I felt feverish and, in spite of fatigue, sleep evaded me.

After a while, Clausen remarked on this.

"I'm afraid you received some injuries," he added. "You would have escaped them, had you fallen in with Dr. Roland's wishes."

"So you knew about it, then?"

"No more than I could help knowing. I respect Dr. Roland, but I've no wish to share his confidence." Clausen spoke sharply, with distaste. "We meet as scientists; in other ways, we stand apart. I try myself to keep out of controversies. In the centre of the maelstrom there is always a small patch of calm, where a leaf could float undisturbed."

This was my opportunity. Clausen was in a mood unguarded, not relaxed but unstrung, a mood of doubt and introspection that might lead, with some encouragement, to the imparting of confidences, even to—or perhaps especially to—a stranger. I, too, after the day's events, was in a state of heightened sensibility, and all of a sudden I felt as if twenty years had slipped away and I was back in childhood with my father come to say good night. These treats were irregular, and always I tried not to hope that he would come so as to avoid disappointment. I think this taught me, early in life, that the pessimist is happier than his opposite: the less you expect, the fewer let downs. My father was a quiet, reserved man who never felt at ease with his children, so that our relationship, while full of mutual esteem, was never a carefree one. Elements in it might have been dimly reflected now, between myself and Clausen; there I lay in bed feeling absurdly childish, with my aching bruises, and

there he sat feeling—what? Unhappy, certainly; ill at ease, if not through my agency; lonely, I suspect; as much in need as I was, in his different way, of human sympathy.

I pondered his remark about the leaf floating in the calm spot at the centre of a maelstrom. The ideal of detachment. A good ideal, a proper one for a scientist—or so I would have thought a month ago. I'm not sure now. Because, for one thing, I think Roland is a deceiver. If so, should Clausen deal with him on equal terms? Or do I condemn Roland only because he's harmed me? How one longs for a straight black-and-white issue, but it's a dusty answer every time.

I said to Clausen, "Of course you know that Roland is using this place as a convenient cover for his nationalist ambitions."

"Yes, I know that," he said sombrely.

"And you've no objections?"

"That's a foolish remark. Do you suppose that anyone wishes to be used as—shall I say a Trojan horse?" He laughed. "At the best, it's uncomfortable for the horse to have a great many hot-headed young men jumping about in his belly. It's one thing to object; another to prevent the happening."

"You could break off relationships with Roland."

Clausen didn't reply for a while, but knotted and unknotted the piece of string in his fingers. Then he said, slowly, "I can no longer do that."

"Then there's only one reason," I persisted, pressing the point beyond the limits of civility. "Somehow or other Roland's got a hold over you."

Clausen said nothing. I fired a random shot.

"It's got something to do with that stray idiot."

Clausen bent his head lower and clasped his hands. It was a queer gesture; where I expected anger or repudiation, he placed himself as it were at my mercy and I felt ashamed of

some cruelty I hadn't intended, rather than pleased at scoring a bull.

"Is there any hold an honest man can't break?" I asked.

He pushed the chair back abruptly and got up to pace about the room. "Life takes no notice of intentions—it's only actions that count. An honest man can walk into a trap."

I hadn't the heart to press him further, but the time had come when he had to talk and I suppose that in all this community there was no one to whom he could open his mind. And I believe it was this very isolation that had driven him into the straits in which he now found himself.

"Yes, I have walked into a trap," he repeated. "And yet, even now, I don't know if—I suppose you have never studied the phenomenon of hypnotism?"

"Never."

"I believe that all the evils of our age arise from a single error," he said reflectively, still pacing the small room. "We have studied the wrong things. We have pursued power instead of knowledge. Here we have one of the great mysteries of the human mind, common to all ages and all peoples, and we have left it mainly to the quacks and cranks and reduced it from a science to a parlour-trick. In Europe, that is; in the East its study has been carried into regions where we westerners can only blunder like drunkards smashing up the furniture. And here's the only path we know of leading directly into the unexplored jungle of the human mind. . . ."

I wondered if the old man was beginning to ramble—and for the first time I did now think of him as old. But I daren't interrupt, and after a bit more pacing he resumed his monologue.

"I've studied it for years in a desultory way; and when I came to Luala I soon realized that individuals in many African tribes have for long understood how to bring about

that state of the dissociation of mental processes from the conscious mind that enables them to control the actions of others. In fact, they've inherited a knowledge of hypnotic practice which underlies all the phenomena that have puzzled outside observers—rain-making, for instance, indifference to pain, the response to poison ordeals, and all those manifestations of witchcraft which defy explanation by rational means."

This was a new idea to me and I didn't follow it fully—if he suggested that witchcraft was a form of hypnosis, their practice of the art must be a great deal more advanced than anything we realize.

He went on: "It was obvious to me that here was one of the most priceless of all possessions in the hands of its last heirs, who'd received it perhaps in a direct line from the ancient Egyptians. The priests of Egypt, as we know, had pushed the study of this science farther than it has since been carried by any body of men. Here might be the last residue of their knowledge, corrupted almost beyond recognition and fading as quickly as our African light fades at the end of the day."

I tried to remember what I'd heard or read about hypnosis: dentists who pulled out teeth without anaesthetics; painless childbirth; fakirs walking on red-hot coals; the theory that the Indian rope-trick is performed by throwing the spectators into a hypnotic trance; Africans who die because they believe themselves bewitched.

"And in our own case," Clausen went on, "I mean in Europe, our knowledge has declined; it's atrophying, like so many of our human faculties. Do you understand that?" He looked at me with a desperate intensity, though I don't believe he saw me, I was simply a shape on a bed, but I was also a symbol of all the inert creatures that he had to convince.

"We are atrophying, because we choose to develop one of our faculties at the expense of all the others—the lust for power. To it we sacrifice all the latent capabilities within us that earlier men knew of—the little buds of understanding, they are smothered by this monstrous growth. How often are we told that man has conquered nature! But never that the conquerer who enslaves his captives, and murders all who cannot serve him, is both a monster and a fool! We live no longer as a part of nature, content to be one species out of many making up the whole pattern of life; we must be the only species, and all others must serve us or die. That is the choice before them: be eaten, used or played with by man, to serve one of his purposes, no matter how trivial—or perish: that is the choice before every plant and animal in the world. Because of our stupendous pride we walk alone, feared and hated by every other species except for those we have turned into sycophants. That is our crime, and we pay for it with the hatred of all other living things."

He was wandering off the point, but I didn't like to interrupt; I thought some thread might snap if I spoke at all, and certainly if I tried to direct his argument; so I lay silent and watched him pacing the room with a long stride, followed by a shadow that cavorted around the bookshelves, now large, now small. But then he began to work his way back to his theme.

"Here are these people, these Africans," he continued, "very ancient people, still living as men lived before recorded history began: that is, as a part of nature, as one of its components, respecting the other species as partners and not exploiting them as slaves. So they have developed not as tyrants, but as whole men. And so I wanted to learn from them some of the things that we have forgotten. Even today it's almost too late, there isn't one amongst these younger men who come to Luala who can help me; to them, the wis-

dom of old men is ignorance and all knowledge lies in books. It is dying here too, and in a few years it will be gone."

At this point I wanted to argue, for I've never believed in this idea that ancient wisdom lurks among the primitives, or that today's civilization is little more than a blind alley—even if Clausen subscribes to it; but I still kept my silence, the pacing continued, the voice resumed.

"I spoke of hypnosis: that's one of the faculties still in use with them that we used once, before we dismissed it as hocus-pocus and allowed it to atrophy. Can we imagine, today, any person actually receiving the stigmata? The organic changes, I mean? Yet in the middle ages it was a frequent outcome of the hypnotic state induced by religious ecstasy. One can doubt neither the fact of stigmatization, nor the cause—the origin in hypnosis. Although one must admit"—And here Clausen's voice did for a moment lighten, and a dryness came into it—"that some of the recorders laid it on a bit thick: as I recollect, the marks on the body of Johanna della Croce of Madrid appeared every Friday and vanished on Sunday and gave out an odour of violets. The violets are a charming embellishment."

"You believe," I asked, now venturing to speak, and with some incredulity, "that such marks could actually bleed?"

"I believe that people believed them to bleed," Clausen answered. "That is the whole essence. Faith can move mountains, mark the body, kill or cure, so long as belief is absolute. Since I began to investigate I have witnessed occurrences fully as remarkable, as mysterious—and as indelible."

Now at last he was approaching the crux of the matter and I asked him whether he was certain that he wished to continue, for I didn't want to steal his confidence, I wanted to receive it only if he knew what he was doing. He took this in his stride; after goodness knows how many years of silence,



the words gushed out. I can't attempt to put them all down and I must summarize, as best I can, some of the things that he told me: starting with a little local history.

The people of this district, like many Nilotics, belong to a tribe previously ruled by a priest-king. At the time when the French were taking over, this king, or chief, resisted and was ultimately deposed. He died soon afterwards and his hereditary powers passed to a nephew, now in late middle age. Vuko is the name of this man.

Although he exercises no political function, the tribesmen still regard him as their rightful ruler and he remains the custodian of symbols and rituals that link him, and through him the whole tribe, with the world of spirits in which all believe. How far his magical powers are still credited by the younger generation is a moot point—perhaps farther than most would admit. By the older men and women he is accepted as a magician and priest who can consult the spirits, foretell the future, cure sickness, bring rain, invoke disasters on his enemies and propitiate those dead ancestors whose anger will bring harm to the tribe.

This general acceptance of his powers is, of course, the first prerequisite for their exercise. People believe that he can work wonders and that opens their minds to the suggestion that he is performing them. Thus are created illusions in the classic style.

At first Clausen, lacking these beliefs, lacked also the suggestibility. Thus on the first occasion when he saw Vuko's powers extended, he himself did not share the illusion. The result, he said, was fantastic, incredible—"I know now what the expression means, to doubt one's own eyes. There are times when I can't believe that I can have seen it. But since then . . ."

This was the illusion. There was a man who had defied Vuko—I don't know the ins and outs of the story, they don't

matter: the point was that he had refused to accept some judgment and had barricaded himself in his hut, protected himself with magic and challenged Vuko to do his worst. Vuko led a party of elders to the clearing outside the hut and sacrificed a goat in the usual callous and lingering fashion. Then came the making of medicine, which all the elders sipped from a calabash; the anointing of their heads, chests and navels with magic powder; and various other rites such as are generally performed. Their object, Clausen said, is to create a semihypnotic state of hypersensitivity. . . . Of course he wasn't sensitized in this way.

At last the preliminaries were completed. Vuko intoned a long prayer, the tempo of his speech slowly growing, the tenor of his voice rising, the whole mounting to a powerful climax, by which time the faces of the elders were (Clausen said) glazed and rapt, their eyes fixed, their mouths half-open, as if they were seeing visions in the air. Then Vuko seized a brand such as those used for lighting fires and advanced upon the barricaded hut of his enemy. He thrust this unlighted brand into the thatch as a man would do if he was setting fire to the roof—and Clausen said that he himself could almost see a flame spurting up and hear the crackle of a conflagration.

What he almost saw, they evidently did see with complete conviction. There was a gasp, a sort of moan, from the on-lookers, and Vuko stood there with his arms above his head, crying out in a high treble; then he ducked, and ran as if from a scorching heat. Some of the others flung arms across their faces as if to shield their eyes from the blaze. Clausen said that the blood drumming in his ears was like the roaring of flames. Then, suddenly, his very heart was frozen by a ghastly scream, indeed a whole crescendo of screams, from inside the hut.

"This was the worst sound on earth," Clausen said. "The

sound from the pit, that no one can hear without his bowels turning to water; it was the sound of a human being in mortal agony."

He started to rush towards the hut, but Vuko seized an arm and held him: he said that Vuko had the strength of a gorilla, although he didn't look a powerful man. The screams died down and ended in the ghastly gurgle of a dying man. Then there was silence, broken only by a few groans from the watching elders. Clausen looked at them: their eyes were fixed with a rapt intensity on the hut: some of them had drawn blankets over their stiffened bodies, as if to protect them from the heat of the flames.

And there stood the hut in the shade of a silk-cotton tree: silent, barred, unscathed.

After a long silence, or semisilence, movement returned; the elders started to stir and rub their faces; one pointed at the hut and exclaimed. Two others rose to their feet and walked slowly towards the hut, as if picking their way over hot cinders. And then, Clausen said, one of them walked straight into the wall of the hut. He stepped back, astounded: he'd bumped into the invisible. Vuko was there in a flash, hustling back the two men; they retreated and he himself strode into the hut. The door went down before him—whether the owner had at last unlatched it, or whether the fastening was a flimsy one, Clausen couldn't say. Presumably, to the elders, there was no door, and he walked into the smouldering ruins of a burnt-out hut.

He emerged dragging a body after him and flung it down in full view. Was the man dead or alive? Clausen didn't know then, and doesn't to this day: but he was sure of one thing. One side of the body was covered with what appeared to be fresh burns. Clausen said there was no mistake about it, he'd seen burns far too often to be deceived.

Vuko rolled the inert body over with his foot, and he and

all the elders filed away from the spot, silently. Clausen went too. Later on he tried to return, but no one would guide him and he lost his way amid all the confusing, winding little paths. He never was able to find again the site of the burning hut that didn't burn, or to discover the fate of Vuko's enemy.

Mass hypnotism, autosuggestion—they sound comforting, easy words but I don't think they had comforted Clausen. He looked as if some of the fear and horror had remained in his mind to this day.

Clausen meant to investigate, and he did. The test was, could Vuko create illusions in his, in Clausen's mind, if Clausen was willing to submit himself to the experiment?

I've never realized before how brave those men are who become their own guinea pigs. It's courageous enough to do this with the straightforward sciences—to test the effects on the human body of high altitude or dangerous gases (as Haldane has, and many others) or to infect oneself with hookworm or malaria. But Clausen was venturing even farther into the unknown, into the dangerous region of the mind. He was pledging his mental integrity, his most precious possession: his personality, the essence of his being. He was handing it over to a savage, in order to advance a little the boundaries of knowledge. Others pledge their bodies; he, his soul. It was incredibly bold, daring—and foolhardy. Anyone else, I think, would have shrunk back. He went forward—into fear, doubt and misery.

He allowed—or rather, persuaded—Vuko to put him into hypnotic trances and these, at first, were not alarming. He didn't altogether lose his own identity, but was (as it were) split into two: one side knew what the other side was doing

and for the most part this was nothing remarkable. Vuko had considerable power over animals and often carried a small forest rat which never bit him but was savage with others. Once Clausen emerged from a hypnotic state to find his arms and chest severely bitten. Although the marks were deep and numerous, he had felt nothing. After that, no forest rat ever attacked him, he could do what he liked with them and they would come when he called. These rats were used in ordeals and never failed to detect the culprit—or at any rate a man who confessed to the crime. Clausen entered a purgatory of doubt, he said, where objective truth all but vanished. Had you done such-and-such a thing, when you believed yourself that you had done it? Or had Vuko, or someone with Vuko's powers, planted the idea in the prepared soil of your mind?

"The certainties of science," Clausen said, "seemed like the distant vision of a solid island of dry land to a man drowning in a brutal sea."

One art which Vuko practised was that of implanting in the subject's mind a remarkable sense of time, a sort of hidden clock, and with it the command to perform some action long after the end of the hypnotic state. Of course Vuko didn't go by mechanical clocks, but by the sun and moon. Once Clausen came to his senses to find himself standing naked beside the stream that runs below the camp; there's a small waterfall, where a python's said to live, and a pool below it, a deep place of ferns and overhanging boughs and slippery rocks. It was pitch-dark and a young moon was just setting, at about two A.M.

"Vuko told me afterwards that he'd instructed me to go to the pool at the third day of the second moon after 'his soul had told mine,' and at the time of its setting. I had followed his instructions."

"And if they'd been to throw yourself into the pool?"

"I don't know. There's at bottom a core of resistance to any action deeply repugnant. We have our last ditch, our sense of self-preservation."

"Can you tell what actions Vuko has set you?"

Clausen shook his head. "That is what I can't be sure of. That's what I can never know. . . . That's what I have to find out!" When he spoke his last sentence his voice had a desperate vigour in it which shocked me; this was a true cry from the soul. What a position to be in! I had to swallow the words I all but uttered: "You've sold your soul to the devil!"

As if he understood my thoughts, he added, "Not that I think Vuko means any harm. He is a priest, in his own way he means well. He is the protector of the people, he judges them and brings them peace and rain and intercedes for them with the spirits. He doesn't *intend* evil. But he, too, could be an instrument. . . ."

Clausen added that he didn't want to make out that Vuko was a practitioner of the black arts, a sort of Paracelsus or Cagliostro. Hypnosis was in essence perfectly respectable and aboveboard and was used more often for beneficial than for harmful purposes. Even in the case he'd described, Vuko was only fulfilling the function of a judge and jury, condemning a man who'd offended against the community. "I don't fear Vuko as an individual," Clausen said. "I fear the surrendering of my will to a savage."

"You have been patient in listening to me," he continued. "I had intended never to speak of these matters to any living soul until I could publish to the world the full results of my researches. But now I doubt if that will ever be done. Perhaps the creature that started as a guinea pig has turned into a forest rat and forgets the word to turn him back again."

He spoke as a defeated man. What must it be like to feel that inside you, quite unknown, may lie the dormant will of

another person, perhaps an enemy and certainly an antagonist? Think of those wood-wasps that, with a long ovipositor, probe through the timber into the inert body of a tunnelling grub and lay their eggs there, so that their young larvæ, when they hatch, can feed upon the living body of the helpless grub! Even as he prowled about the room talking to me, Clausen's mind might be full of the maggots of Vuko's will: unknown instructions to go there, do this, perform goodness knows what actions. It seemed a slender comfort that Vuko wasn't (or so Clausen told himself) a man of ill will. "He, too, could be an instrument." The ugliest thought of all.

He came then to the final incident. At this point even Clausen's own exposition ceased to be clear, he spoke over and around and under the subject, making forays into it and withdrawing as if he couldn't, even then, bring himself to face the whole thing nakedly and with the calm dispassion of a man of science. I can't attempt to reproduce his words as he spoke them or to say by what stages the picture of the incident he was trying to describe took shape in my mind. The shape itself remained cloudy and I'm not sure now that I have got it right.

There had been a drought and Vuko's powers as a rain-maker were invoked to put matters right. The spirits were angry and had to be soothed—the usual story—and the only thing that soothes a spirit is a sacrifice. Clausen was there, by now promoted from the role of an outsider to that of a participant. He, and Vuko, and the elders were told to come unsullied to the gathering—no food, drink or love-making for the previous twenty-four hours.

This time the prayers and chanting were more prolonged,

and embellished by drummers who beat a slow, subdued tattoo with their knuckles on their hollowed-log instruments. This added to the solemnity but the main purpose, Clausen said, of all such drummings is to induce, with its regular, monotonous, throbbing beat, a state of high suggestibility. He himself placed his mind, so far as he could, in a receptive state, open to whatever influences might be directed to enter it. He only partially succeeded.

"It's impossible," he said, "after a lifetime of training in precisely the reverse direction, to suspend all powers of observation and analysis. Even the conscious effort to do this in itself keeps the mind alert, and alertness must be the first casualty."

The sacrifice duly took place—a white ram. With the others, he was smeared with medicine and swallowed some of the noxious brew. Drums monotonously thudded, prayers were intoned, matters followed the course usual to such procedures, but Clausen was conscious of feelings he hadn't experienced before: first a sort of drowsiness, or mental numbness—"My mind felt as one's feet feel when they are very cold, heavy, and without sensation"—and then a vague sense of expectation and hope—"something below the level of excitement but of the same order, a heightened receptivity of the mind and a diminished sensitivity of the body, which indeed felt light, as though it might float off the ground." These sensations were faint, but definite: there was an increase of saliva, a higher respiration rate and a feeling of euphoria. (Clausen couldn't help observing his own symptoms, although he was attempting to participate, not to observe.)

The meeting took place at about four o'clock and went on for between two and three hours, so that when it ended the sun had set and the quick dusk was falling; but Clausen said



that everything of note took place in daylight and was perfectly clear.

After the ram had been disposed of, Vuko announced that the spirits were offended by long neglect and because many of the ancient ceremonies were no longer observed. The reason for this, that Europeans had forbidden them, was not acceptable, and the elders must choose between leaving the spirits in a bad humour, and unlikely therefore to send rain, and risking the consequences of disobedience.

After some discussion, the sense of the meeting revealed itself: the elders were prepared, in this emergency, to disobey.

At this point, a man Clausen had never seen before was brought in, with his hands bound behind his back. He looked dirty and unkempt and walked woodenly, his head bowed. His guards threw him to the ground, tied him up and dragged him to an open space where Vuko stood with his back to a rock.

Clausen now began to realize what was coming with one part of his mind but (he said) only a small and weak part; the rest of his brain, and the dominant part, seemed not so much indifferent as satisfied. "It was as if I'd seen this before, I knew what was to come and welcomed it, or at the least was content to submit. Yet the part of the mind that was still independent was in revolt. Protest and acceptance, horror and pleasure—they were mixed in hopeless confusion and all my powers of action were sterilized, for the action I had to take was contradictory—to approve and disapprove, to participate and to reject."

Here Clausen broke off, ceased to prowl and sat down at the table with his head in his hands. He was silent for some time. I could only keep silence too, in mute sympathy. What was passing through his mind? Was he recalling these torturing events or seeking to escape from them, summoning up

(as one does) some past and comforting memory of home and affection? No, I think he was trying to press from his mind the very lees of memory, to recall some tiny incident, some minute forgotten observation, that would prove to himself either that the events of that evening had happened as he recollected them or—and this is what his soul yearned for—that they had never happened at all.

He did not tell me the story in so many words. I was left to infer it. But there was not much doubt. Vuko invoked a grim irony to gratify the pupil. The spear was thrust into *his* hand. His will to resist Vuko's orders had by then melted away. The drums quickened their beat, the incantation drew them all together and his arm and muscle became the mere expression of communal will. He felt no repugnance. Nor could there be, at that time, any doubt. Blood soaked the ground all around the head "like a halo." "I saw it," he cried, "as I see my hand before my eyes here and now. I felt it and I saw it. And then . . ."

People closed in and Clausen sat alone, limply, drained of thought and will. He heard Vuko speaking from a long way off and paid no attention. But then it appeared that the matter was not ended. An argument had sprung up among the elders, some opposing Vuko, some supporting him. The drums were silent now.

Vuko came across to Clausen and took his arm and said, "You have done well. The spirits are satisfied; and to show their approval they will accept the spirit of this man to be their servant and return to us his body, which they do not need, and this will keep us out of trouble with the government. Come, and you shall see."

Clausen sat down with the others and Vuko stood between him and the body on the ground making motions with his arms, while the drums started up again very softly and slowly—as if, Clausen said, they were intent to call a frightened

spirit from the branches of a tree. "This was a holy place," he added. "It was from the rock at Vuko's back that their god brought forth their ancestors and it bears the footprint of their Adam, the first man, who was summoned back by God to the spirit world. And you can still, they say, see the mark where, when he vanished, he dug his spear into the ground. It became a tree, and from the progeny of that tree the hafts of spears must always be made."

Once again his mind was edging off the matter that obsessed him, trying to find solace in irrelevancy. He had come now to the crux, which was not the sacrifice, or even his part in it, but something more elusive and torturing: the question of what had happened and what had not, of the abyss that faced you if faith in your own intelligence and your own integrity broke down. For where can a man place his trust if his own apprehension fails him? It was something like this that Clausen tried to tell me, but he groped after the words.

What happened, at any rate, was this. After a while a figure with his arms bound behind him, the very man who had been sacrificed, stood upright in front of Clausen and the others with his head bowed. Two men led him slowly away. He didn't look up or speak and his feet dragged. As he went by, Clausen saw a dark gash across the neck.

Had Vuko paraded a substitute man—a piece of property in a conjuring trick? Or had Clausen himself, on this occasion, surrendered to the forces he had resisted at the time of the burning hut? He didn't think so—didn't think that his mental dissociation had been complete. He was still aware of what he did. But that, too, might have been illusory—the awareness. The whole affair was such a web of doubt, such a tangle of impossibilities, that Clausen could find no thread to grasp. None. Truth had splintered into fragments like a broken mirror.

One fact did seem to emerge from the confusion, and that was the worst of all: that Vuko could make Clausen do—or seem to do?—whatever he wanted, even if it outraged every ingrained decent feeling. Think of the implications. . . . Clausen has. Leaning forward, and staring at me with the fixed look a dog can give sometimes, he said, “This is my trouble: I don’t know, as I sit here, what I may have done already, or what seeds are planted in me of things that I must do tomorrow, or the next day, or the next week! Even if I were to go away—”

“That’s it,” I said quickly. “You must go away, completely away, a holiday in Europe—that will put things right.”

“How can it put right what has already happened? Don’t you see—I *have to know! I have to know!*”

Never did I dream I’d live to be sorry for Clausen—myself, an itinerant dogsbody. He’s in a hell that seems to have no way out.

This story clears up several mysteries, such as Clausen’s reaction to the idiot with the scarred neck. The scar was there all right: but then, of course, it might have been there long before. I can understand now why Xenophon and the others feared him. He’s an empty body, his spirit never returned.

I asked Clausen whether he’d found out anything about the idiot: where he comes from, his family, how long he’s been without his wits. Clausen is again in the dark. The idiot disappears at intervals but always returns. Perhaps he lives, between whiles, on roots and berries in the forest, perhaps he begs from scattered homesteads, perhaps, somewhere, he has a family—no one knows.

“There’s one thing,” I said, “that doesn’t fit into the picture.”

"Only one!"

"Well, one other . . . Dr. Roland. You haven't mentioned him."

"Well, what of Roland? Must I mention him?"

Clausen's nerves had reached breaking point, but I felt a desperate need to find out that much more.

"He knows, of course," I asked, "about it all?"

Clausen gave a sad little bark of a laugh and said somberly that Roland knew everything that could be of use to him, and found a use for everything he knew. "He finds a use for me because I'm—respectable." He laughed again, and it was painful. "Respectable. I am the façade. A beautiful façade with porticos, columns, Corinthian capitals. And behind it there are the beetles and the dry rot and the worms."

He spoke bitterly, yet nothing brought home to me a plainer realization of his predicament than the relative indifference with which he treated the humiliation of Roland's use of him as a pawn in Roland's game. I'd have expected him to revolt against this ignominy at whatever cost—to assert his independence and denounce Roland's schemes. After all it is Vuko, not Roland, of whom he's afraid. At some point in the long journey this crisis has been passed and Clausen took the wrong decision: or perhaps Roland was clever enough to prevent a moment of decision ever presenting itself. Clausen slipped imperceptibly into his puppet-hood, unsuspecting or unnoticing, stage by stage, and now he's beyond resentment, his mind is too much occupied with deeper troubles. My God, Roland's a subtle devil! He must have planned all this far ahead. Did he, I wonder, even employ Vuko as a bait? Or use his wits to turn the situation to his own account after it had arisen?

"How much," I asked (I worded it clumsily), "does Roland deal with Vuko, do you know?"

"Deal with him? How can I tell what Roland does? He'd

deal with the devil if it advanced his ends. You mustn't ask me what Roland does, I've enough to answer for on my own account."

Poor Clausen, he's a man obsessed. Several things puzzle me still: for instance, Vuko's willingness to enrol Clausen as his pupil. This can scarcely have arisen from personal affection, or from an altruistic wish to share with him the hereditary secrets of the rain-makers and priest-kings. But if Vuko had been acting under instructions. . . . Roland has more to offer him than Clausen has—the recovery of power and prestige, a restoration of the old order, the casting out of alien interference. All these things would draw the rain-maker into Roland's net.

"By the way," I asked, "*did* it rain, after the sacrifice?"

"Yes. Within twenty-four hours."

Clausen was abstracted, he was back again with his torment, searching for the clear, sharp outline of truth in a splintered mirror.

"It was Bamili Rock, where all this happened?"

He nodded, and began again to pace the room with his hands clasped behind his back. "I shall go away," he said. "I shall go back to peace and sanity, to the cold skies and the salt sea of my own country where I can escape these things. Everything's distorted here, the sun's heat burns out one's sanity. I shall go away—but first, I must find the truth! I'll tear it out like a living heart from the body if I have to. It won't be long. In two days . . ."

"At Bamili Rock," I said.

"Yes, yes, of course! This time I shall see things for what they are, the trickery of a master of illusion . . . and yet, I heard the cry, I saw the stain on the ground!"

Wretched devil, he's lived too much isolated; amid the crowds who've come to see him he's had no companionship, no wife, no family to peg him down to the small realities.

And no faith in God either—he's a pagan, Kaplan was right. So he's floated off into the dirty weather like a kite without a tail, lost and doomed. Yet he started in all innocence.

He's gone, and it is past midnight. My fingers are cramped and my bones ache. My kit is burnt, I've no job, no money, no prospects, I'm in love with a girl I may lose, or never win. Yet I wouldn't change places with Dr. Ewart Clausen, winner of the Nobel Prize, for all the gems in India. He's in chains; and I'm free.





## BOOK THREE

# *Bamili Rock*

I LEFT early, taking the mole and my money from the thatch of the garden-house. Miss Young was full of expressions of distress that I had lost everything; little enough, as I tried to convince her. On the way through Lua-la I bought a sponge and toothbrush, pajamas and a few other necessities.

I paid Chris his deposit and took the car, a dented little Citroën which is thoroughly acclimatized to these roads, or tracks rather. The fifteen miles to Bamili seemed like fifty, up and down forest-covered hills and over so-called bridges with water lapping at the logs. The many streams are swollen by recent rain. A few more heavy storms, and the track will be impassable.

My first surprise was to be stopped about a mile out of Lua-la, at the first bridge, by Elizabeth. She had a bundle in one hand, in the best Dick Whittington tradition, a white plastic handbag in the other, and wore a red overcoat. She announced quite simply, "I come with you."

"But you can't. I'm going up to Bamili."

"Then you will return, and go to Nairobi."

"No, to Stanleyville."

She shrugged her shoulders, and said in her high, gentle voice, like a dove cooing, "I do not care. I shall not stay with James any longer."

"But you can't just attach yourself to me!"

"I helped you when you had been beaten. Now I want you to help me."

The logic of this was inescapable, and Elizabeth made me feel churlish. Also embarrassed. She got into the car.

We climbed most of the way after leaving Luala, traversing the spurs of a long range of hills intersected by many watercourses. All this is part, I suppose, of the watershed of the Congo system, which gradually declines on the eastward side towards the plains of Darfur and the far-distant swampy reaches of the Bahr-el-Ghazal. The country became more forested and we passed through patches of quite dense vegetation where road clearance must have been hard work. Plenty of stumps remained to attest its severities, and also to impale the car, if one didn't drive carefully. This road as yet, I understand, has no official existence, it's a new track cut by Rivière to open up a district hitherto neglected because of its remoteness and inaccessibility.

I asked Elizabeth what had happened to James, but she merely shook her head and answered, "He does not treat me well."

We were up against the barrier of language, her English was too limited to tell me what was on her mind, and I entirely lacked her tongue.

"It is too far from home," she added. And, later, "He has bad friends."

"You mean Roland?"

"Yes. And there are others also. I am afraid of what they will do."

"Have you heard of Vuko?" The name shook her, she looked at me sideways and seemed to bunch herself together as if to resist some threat. She nodded. "He has spoken that name."

"What did he say?"

"I do not know. I did not listen. I want to go home."

"We're travelling in the opposite direction."

"You came from Nairobi. Everyone is a stranger but you and James. Although you are a European you came from there and you will return."

"Any port in a storm," I said, but she didn't understand.

A little farther on she asked, "Why do you go to Bamili?"

"Out of curiosity."

"You should not go. It is dangerous, they will kill you if they find you there."

"I don't think so."

"You should go back to Nairobi."

"I told you, I shall go to Stanleyville."

"I do not know that place. Why do you go there?"

"To see the girl I'm in love with."

"She is in LuaLa."

"She left yesterday, with Mr. Zuckermann."

Elizabeth shook her head. "They are in the resthouse."

I was dumbfounded, then incredulous. Surely, if anything had happened to delay them, Gemma would have let me know? I was certain that Elizabeth had made a mistake, and she was equally sure that she had not.

"Mr. Zuckermann," she said, stumbling over the name, "is sick. So they remain."

It was like a blow between the eyes. Gemma has been there a whole day and a night (if Elizabeth isn't lying) and hasn't sent me word: no summons, no message. What can that mean, except that when she had time to think things over, she changed her mind? Or not even changed it, perhaps her mind had never been made up, perhaps it was merely a question of a hungry body that will take what it can get. A bitter, bitter blow. My first impulse was to turn the car around and go straight back to LuaLa: this is more important to me now than all Clausen's unsolved problems, or the mysteries of Bamili Rock. But what's to be gained by

going back if Gemma has so little wish to see me that she couldn't send a message over to the camp, with only three miles between us?

"Is Gemma ill too?" I asked, full of sudden fears.

"No, only the mister. Gemma is taking him food."

There was an unmistakable note in Elizabeth's voice that to some extent reassured me. She is jealous—that seems ridiculous, but I think she is—and may not have been telling the whole truth. It might be that Zuckermann is really bad and that Gemma can't leave him; or that he isn't bad at all and they'd expected to start for Stanleyville the day before; or even that Elizabeth has made it all up to make me return to Luala—anything.

By now the few huts that make up the little outpost could be seen above us on the next ridge, and so I went on. Bamili station lies on a tongue of land between two streams, surrounded by forest: not the dense, damp rain-forest but the more patchy kind, with open glades here and there and a lot of prickly undergrowth, impossible to penetrate except along narrow twisting game-paths. Bamili's thatch is fresh and the stumps of the felled trees are still raw and unweathered. There's a clean smell—balsam mixed with leaf mould?—in the air, and the earth's red and rich-looking in the clearings.

The only building you could call a house is Rivière's combined office and dwelling with a pole in front flying the French flag. It's made of logs with a corrugated iron roof and has a veranda in front for business and a smaller one behind for privacy. Rivière came out to greet me with a cigarette hanging, as it always seems to, from his underlip and a straw hat on the back of his head, and told me that he was starting within the hour on a short safari to see a chief about a tax dispute.

"Taxes, women and worms," Rivière said. "Those are their principal troubles. Thank God I deal with the first

only, except when the second leads to broken heads or law-suits."

He was very hospitable, and said that I was welcome to stay as long as I liked. I had a job to carry off (as it were) Elizabeth. He gave her a long, penetrating look—one of those glances that can strip a person bare—and then turned to me and said pointedly, "You are welcome to my bedroom. My wife is away."

I felt oafish, and fumbled over an introduction. "This is Elizabeth. She came with me."

"So I see," Rivière observed, with the ghost of a smile.

"Can you find accommodation for her too?"

"But of course. I have told you my wife is away."

I felt horribly embarrassed, and probably blushed, and made things worse by saying that she'd run away from Luála and was on the way to Nairobi.

"That is the direction," he said, pointing back down the track and not now concealing his amusement.

Elizabeth was standing there looking puzzled and unwanted, and I was afraid her feelings would be hurt, so I asked him to let me explain later and meanwhile to find her sleeping quarters elsewhere. Rivière laughed and clapped me on the shoulder and said, "Well, you are peculiar, you English, there's nothing to be ashamed of, she is a nice-looking young woman, and healthy. But I'll do as you wish."

He gave a houseboy some instructions and Elizabeth was led away. I felt more uncomfortable than ever, for she was being treated like a piece of luggage and "not wanted on the voyage" at that: but what could I do? Rivière, still amused, poured us each a Pernod and explained that he could not defer his short safari, but that he'd be back the following afternoon; I was to make myself at home meanwhile and—he looked at me quizzically—to enjoy such amenities as the sta-

tion had to offer, together with those I had provided for myself.

I replied, rather snappily, that I hadn't come to amuse myself, I'd come to investigate certain peculiar stories I'd heard about Bamili Rock. I wanted to see it for myself, if he would give me the directions.

Rivière at once became serious. "I can't do that. I told you that this rock is a sacred place among these people. It is best to leave these shrines entirely alone. We have enough trouble already without inviting it by giving offence in matters of religion."

"But you have been there yourself?"

"Once, yes: I stayed only a few minutes and I had a guide. I hope you won't consider this unfriendly, but as the *administrateur* of the district I must forbid you to visit the rock in my absence. On my return, I will see what can be arranged."

This was a snag, but I could see Rivière's point, and it was no use to argue, so I tried another tack.

"You know a man called Vuko, of course?"

He gestured with his hands. "As you say, of course."

"I understand his influence over the local people is very great."

Rivière laughed. "I understand that also. It is greater than mine, certainly. As a matter of fact, this safari that I'm about to start on is indirectly his affair. He has started a campaign—underground, of course—against the payment of taxes. Most things that happen in this district are his affair, and always indirectly." Rivière started to move restlessly about the room, his glass in his hand, evidently just as strung up and nervous as he'd been at Zuckermann's. "Never, never do you hear it said: Vuko orders this, Vuko advises you not to pay. Vuko has forbidden the young men to repair the bridge. When I meet Vuko, he is as affable as a man who wants to sell me an automobile. He works underground al-

ways, burrowing, burrowing, undermining—isn't that the meaning of his name? Indeed, he is well-named."

"What is the meaning of his name?"

"Vuko means mole."

So that was it! I took the mole out of my pocket and gave it to Rivière.

"What do you make of that?"

He handled it gingerly. "Where did you get it?"

"From Roland."

"Roland! He gave it to you?"

"No, I took it: and ever since, he's been trying to get it back."

Rivière turned it over in his hand. "It's well carved."

"What's the connection between Roland and Vuko?"

Rivière linked together his two little fingers. "Like that. Roland has great ambitions, and all Africa for his stage. He must embrace in one movement not only the students, the *evolués*, the men from the towns, but also the tribesmen who are still so much in the majority. Vuko holds these primitives in the hollow of his hand. His reputation as a magician has spread far afield, I believe that colleagues in his profession have come to consult him from as far away as Liberia. Those two are natural allies. Roland is the general, Vuko the lieutenant—but a powerful one in his own right."

"A strong combination. And against it—?"

Rivière roared with laughter, he threw back his head and almost howled—there was an hysterical note. "That's a good joke," he choked; and added, as he calmed down, "Against it, my dear young friend, we have—well, myself, with six policemen, a desk stacked with papers from Brazzaville, and the universal distrust of the community; we have words, promises and exhortations, we have hospitals and schools—and taxes; we have the glittering prospect that one day, if everyone does as we tell him, he will become an honorary

Frenchman and, if he is very good, possess a vote to send a deputy to Paris, which might as well be on the moon for all he cares. So much against the ambitions of Roland, the powers of Vuko, all the ancient customs and religions of this very ancient land. You take a forest tree, you lop off a few branches and trim the rest with bunting and balloons and you say: look, we have transformed the tree, it is now an ornament to any garden. And the tree groans with laughter."

He put the mole back into my hand. "You must burn this immediately. Or, if it won't burn, bury it. It's dangerous."

"It might be a kind of passport," I suggested.

"It might be a kind of death warrant. Throw it away and forget these things; the weather is pleasant now the rains are breaking; this is a delightful spot; you have an amiable companion; enjoy your brief vacation, and don't walk more than a hundred yards from the station while I'm away."

"I've come for a reason," I said. "There's going to be a gathering at Bamili Rock and I think it may take place in the next day or two. Night or two, rather. And I want to be there."

Rivière exploded—he's an explosive chap—and said that I was insane and idiotic; in any case, he'd forbid it categorically. "Don't you think I've enough troubles without a dead Englishman on my hands? Do you seriously believe that you'd be able to approach within a thousand yards of the shrine? Perhaps you think they'll offer you a front seat and serve refreshments in the intervals? Chocolates, peanuts, cigarettes. You Englishmen. . . !" He pulled himself up from this little spurt of his own (or our own) brand of nationalism and poured himself another drink, muttering something in French about Anglo-Saxon arrested development.

"There have been many meetings at Bamili Rock," he added. "Perhaps there is one tonight or tomorrow night, as



you say. It won't be the first—I daresay they've been meeting there since the days of Nefertiti—nor the last either, but it's no concern of ours. Or, if it is, we can't stop it."

"And you have no curiosity?"

He waved his glass towards a photograph standing on his desk. "I have a wife and family. My wife is now in Brazzaville giving birth to our fourth child. In fifteen years, if all goes well, I shall get my pension. My wife's father has a little property at St. Seine l'Abbaye to which we shall retire. A small place beside the Côte d'Or, you wouldn't know it; the land is well cultivated, there are fish in the river, and birch woods near, it's a quiet little town. There I shall cultivate my garden and become acquainted with my children and even go to church, perhaps, on Sundays; and as to what goes on at Luala, and the rites that are practised at Bamili Rock, and the ambitions of Dr. Roland, and the schemes of Mr. Zuckermann, and the burrowings of the mole—all these will become as immaterial to me as the chirpings of sparrows on the other side of the world."

I should say that Rivière has had as much as he can take of the solitude here, the isolation, and the knowledge that he's sitting on a volcano.

"I have warned them in Brazzaville," he added, after he'd again said good-bye and repeated his instructions that I was not to stir out of the station. "I've warned them again and again. Report after report . . . no one can say that I've neglected my duty. But one has a duty also to one's family: and that is, to stay alive."

He needs a change—like Clausen; everybody seems to need a change. He and Clausen have been confronted with the same situation and they've made opposite choices: Clausen to go in and engage, Rivière to stay out and survive. With all Clausen's wisdom, perhaps he hasn't made as wise a choice as Rivière, the run-of-the-mill colonial servant with no pre-

tensions to powers of judgment—but with a family. Yet, if Rivière's is the wiser course, Clausen's is the nobler. Rivière can add nothing to the sum of human knowledge. Clausen may. But at what a cost!

Rivière left at last with half a dozen porters, a personal servant and a gun-bearer. He put me, he said, in the care of his head factotum and showed me a rifle I could use on the small buck that often emerged from the forest in the evening and early morning. "But remember, please, that you are under my orders while you are here and that you are not to go out of sight of the station, and you must take my houseboy with you if you stroll out with the gun." He sounded quite official. I don't want to cause him trouble or to run into any more myself either. But Bamili Rock is only about two miles away.

I found Elizabeth installed in the cook's household and apparently quite happy with a couple of small kids. I don't know what language they were all talking, but they seemed to manage somehow to make themselves understood.

"Now I've repaid you for your kindness to me when I was injured," I said. "So we're quits. Will you start another round by helping me again?"

When she had understood my meaning she said that she would.

"I want to visit the place that you have heard James speak of. Bamili Rock. There must be a path from here and everyone must know it, but I don't suppose they'll tell me. Now, can you find out for me where the path begins?"

Elizabeth looked unhappy and scared. "I do not know the path. I do not know the people here."

"All the same, there are ways of asking questions. This

may help." I put some money into her hand. She shook her head again and muttered, but I knew that she was anxious to please me and I'm afraid I traded on it. After some more persuasion I took a walk around—a very neat, tidy little station—and had an excellent light luncheon served on Rivière's veranda, with a bottle of iced beer.

I was stiff in the limbs and still sore, but everything seemed to be mending and I thought that exercise would provide the best treatment.

Eventually, after some trouble, I found Elizabeth who reported, with great reluctance, in a voice almost inaudible, that she had been told where the path started from, but that was all.

"It is better not to go there," she said.

I asked her if she'd come for a walk and show me the direction, after that I'd look out for myself. Her feelings were clearly mixed. Finally she nodded, and when I set out briskly uphill—there seemed to be no other direction—she dropped back and walked behind me, a custom, I suppose, so ingrained that she automatically fell into it. I took her arm, and made her walk side by side.

Rivière is continuing his road, by degrees, to the north (Luála lies almost due south of the station), and one day, in the distant future, Bamili may be linked with the Chad. This first part is hard going and the road has not progressed very far. After we had walked uphill for about fifteen minutes Elizabeth pointed to a tall tree with a beehive in its branches and said that the path I wanted started there and led off to the right.

"Now I go," she said, and did so—almost bolted. Unless I'd known where to look I'd never have found the opening, it was almost totally hidden. But I pushed my way in and found a path so low and narrow that I could scarcely stand upright. I felt as if I were scrabbling along a deep green

tunnel, and the going was atrocious: fallen timbers everywhere, each log covered in a thick slippery coat of moss. Underneath, the termites had reduced the timber almost to powder and one had only to kick a great, solid-looking mossy trunk for one's toe to sink right in, as if one had kicked a sponge.

Ferns sprouted from the forks of the towering trees and long lianas trailed down. Huge fungi grew like monstrous ears out of the bark. It was very dark and quiet and I could see no sky, only, here and there, the semblance of a blue star where a chink in the canopy let in a thread of light. Quiet, and yet not quiet—a constant, muted symphony of little ploppings, rustles, flat pattering sounds. (No twigs to break, they were too rotten.) A hundred pairs of eyes might have been on you, a dozen living creatures might have lain concealed within ten paces, and you could see nothing.

I thought of snakes—plenty of those here I've no doubt; also leopards, genets, forest pig. All invisible. A salt lick or a drinking place would give the hunter his only chance to see the game.

I thought also of other fauna, of Vuko's fellow-tribesmen, of Roland's followers. They knew my movements, certainly. I had no protection here. It would be easy to fake a death to look as if a leopard or a snake had struck. I felt utterly deserted, as if I were the only man on earth and all nature my enemy. As for spirits—it's easy to scoff them off in cities and tame countries, but here they are in every shadow, behind each giant tree trunk, in the worm-eaten bole that collapses underfoot with an inaudible sigh. There is a feeling of tension, of *listening*, as if the whole forest were the tight-stretched membrane of some gigantic, protean, primeval ear. And if it didn't like what it heard, a single twitch of that mighty membrane would blot out any tiny little creature that had dared to irritate the dozing monster.

Soon I was running with sweat as I stumbled on, wondering whether I was on the right track or whether this was just a game-path leading nowhere. At last I saw light ahead and in a few moments stood, to my immense relief, at the edge of a clearing. In the tunnel it had been hot, clammy, and so oppressive that the air itself, loaded with the dank, fetid smell of toadstools and of rotting vegetation, seemed to possess some thick, almost viscous consistency.

I sat down on a log which, for once, didn't give way, and breathed gratefully. A moment later I leaped up again in a sweat of panic. Something large, fat and blue scuttled by my feet, all but touching them. It was a scorpion with a wicked, curled-up tail. Then I noticed that the log itself was crawling with insects of different kinds; the very ground seemed alive with creatures darting about, burrowing and biting, gnawing and stinging and eating each other. I suppose my imagination was getting overheated. I stood in the shade for a few moments and watched the butterflies.

In a patch of sunlight, about fifteen paces away, was an object which I at first took for the blossom of some ground creeper of a queer species. It was a brilliant pillar-box red. Then it moved, and shimmered, and danced in the shaft of sun, and I wondered if my eyes were playing tricks: until it dawned upon me that I was looking at an almost solid patch of bright-red butterflies. They were startling and quite magnificent. And they were not the only ones. This might have been a butterfly sanctuary, so many hovered in the bright air and darted to and fro in the shadows. Some were small and bright sky-blue, others opalescent, like mother-of-pearl. Big velvet-black swallowtails whose wings were edged with gold danced by, mingling with others of the more usual black, white and yellow with crimson or royal blue peacocks' eyes in their wing centres. I'd have given anything to have known their names.

I moved a few steps forward and the scarlet cluster on the ground ahead rose like a cloud of whirling petals into the air. The red butterflies had been feasting on a patch of excreta. Even this flamboyant beauty has an ironic undertone.

The marvels of insect life had for the moment distracted my attention from two huts which also occupied the clearing. They looked rough structures, more like temporary shelters than the neat, well-constructed dwellings of Bamili station. Lodges, perhaps, for the guardians of the rock? I went towards them, and a man stepped out of the shadows.

I must admit my heart beat faster; he had a spear in his hand and a club in his belt, he looked muscular and not exactly welcoming. But his greeting was civil. It was also, of course, incomprehensible, as, to him, was my reply. We stood for a while eyeing each other, our conversation at a full stop.

There did not appear to be any exit from the clearing, other than the way by which I'd entered it. These forest paths are extremely deceiving; I didn't doubt that, if I looked closely, I should find several exits; but I should have to search, I couldn't just walk on and wave my hand to him as I went by. So I pointed in the direction in which I assumed the rock to lie and said, ungrammatically, "*Wapi ngia*," just in case he might understand a few Swahili words.

He nodded, as if he did indeed understand, pointed with his spear in what I took to be the right direction and made a gesture which plainly meant "Follow me." This seemed too good to be true, and I reflected that the only sensible course was to retrace my footsteps. I was about to do so when the man looked around and gestured more emphatically, and I decided that I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. If I turned back, he could trap me just as easily—he probably was not alone; if I went on, there was always a chance that I might learn something useful, and survive. After all, this individual *might* not have been warned of my approach, he

*might* be a perfectly innocent, friendly hunter or trapper willing to help a European in the hopes of reward. I went on.

My guide led the way straight into a wall of forest and there, sure enough, was a path. A yard from the opening it was quite invisible. I had to stoop at first but it became a better path than the one I'd hitherto been following, with fewer rotting tree trunks and more room to walk upright. We moved in silence, I had all my work cut out to keep pace. He was a hundred times more surefooted than I and moved as silently as an antelope, whereas I blundered like a blind pig.

We went uphill at first, but then started to descend again and crossed a stream, the second since I started. I had by this time lost all sense of direction. I don't see how one can preserve it when there are no landmarks. Each fungus-covered tree trunk with its ferns and towering branches is the same as the next, and the sun is invisible.

We moved on, he without visible effort, I panting behind. And then, once more, I saw light ahead. In a few moments the sun shone into my eyes—it was nearing the horizon, and I was facing due west. I had started off in an easterly direction. We emerged suddenly on to a track hewn through the trees, with ruts made by lorries. My guide pointed with his spear down the track and smiled politely. I stood at first bewildered, then comprehending, then angry. But there was nothing to be said. With great consideration the man had led me back almost to my starting point. About a hundred yards farther down the track I passed the tree with the beehive. I had been gone between two and three hours—time enough to get to the rock and back twice over. First round a dead loss.

By the time I reached the station my anger had evaporated—I was, after all, alive, and I'd seen the butterflies, and I had little doubt that I'd found the right direction and that my

guide was one of the guardians (there'd certainly be guardians) of the rock.

Then, a surprise; a big, smart car drawn up outside Rivière's bungalow. One of the SMAC automobiles.

Roland, I thought. The big fish came to see what the small fry's up to. Oddly enough, there was something about the sight of that car more chilling than the darkness of the forest. Probably I'd come to see Roland more as a figure of menace, a modern Mephistopheles, than he, or any man, really is. He has his aim, as many others have had before him: Cæsar, Genghis, Chaka, Hitler. He's ruthless because he has to be. But that's how I feel. How wrong I was! It wasn't Roland. I stood in the doorway and looked into Rivière's living room and couldn't believe what I saw—another miracle. It was Gemma.

She had come up to Bamili, she said, to warn me. Zuckermann was better, they were leaving for Stanleyville next day; she hadn't wanted to see me again; but she had something to tell me. Zuckermann had given her permission to take the car and a driver, so long as she returned the same evening, ready for an early start next day.

"I can't stay for more than half an hour and I hope that, when you've heard what I have to say, you'll come with me."

"That all depends what you have to say."

"You must believe me," she said.

It was nearly sundown, so I offered her one of Rivière's drinks, but she chose tea, and the houseboy brought us a tray on the veranda. There was a pleasant view, looking back towards Lua-la: the track winding down to the stream in the valley, the forested slope opposite and the hint of ridges be-



yond; women plodding up the hill with waterpots balanced on their heads. It was all very peaceful.

"Why didn't you let me know that you were still in Lu-ala?" I asked.

"Zuk thought he was dying and I had to stay near him. And after all, he only had a tummy upset."

I said nothing. Just excuses: all my bitterness came back. Yet here she was, tangibly, if even for a few moments: the reality, not the dream. She didn't look well, her dark eyes were large and the shadows under them gave her an appearance of fragility. She never had much colour, but her skin now was waxlike.

"You look about all in," I said.

Gemma cradled the teacup in her hands as if trying to draw strength from it, and I noticed how thin her wrists were and how her skin was like ivory in shadow, with a sort of dark lustre.

"You've got to believe what I say," she repeated.

"Of course."

"You were attacked and beaten up, weren't you?"

"I was indeed."

"And you know who organized it?"

"Yes."

"He knows you're here and what you've come for. Some kind of gathering tomorrow night."

"Clever chap," I said.

"It's not a matter to be facetious about. You've found out too much and he won't let you come back alive from Bamili."

I can't say that this surprised me, but it's never pleasant to hear one's fears confirmed.

"Listen," Gemma said. "That's no empty threat, he can do what he likes around here, people obey him without question. It's no good thinking that things like that don't happen nowadays, because they do. Or that you'll be safe because

you're a European. There's a thousand miles of forest and desert over there"—She gestured in the general direction of Egypt—"and you could disappear without trace. Many do. And *he'd* still be above suspicion, or at least above proof."

"I know all that," I said. "He can rub me off the slate if he wants to, I'm not very big game. To tell the truth—"

But I hadn't the moral courage to admit that I'd already been frightened into wishing I had never come, and had kept my nose out of someone else's business. Now I'd gone too far to retreat.

"You see," I began, "there's Clausen. . . ."

"Clausen! What's he got to do with you? You aren't his nursemaid, are you?"

I laughed; it was absurd, put in those terms. If only he hadn't, last night in the library, made me a partner of his distress! If only it hadn't fallen out, by the hazards of chance, that I was waiting for him at a time and place when he was tempted to open his heart! And now I was linked to him by this unasked complicity in his deepest secrets; an unsolicited accomplice, I was in the way to die for his uncertainties.

"Besides," Gemma added, "Clausen has forfeited the right to be hero-worshipped by you or by anyone. He's wallowed in pitch and even you must see that he's defiled."

"How did you find all this out?" I asked.

Gemma finished her tea, put down the cup and said, "It's getting dark, we ought to be going."

"You've been seeing Roland," I said.

"Of course. I see him every day."

"Why should he tell you this?"

"Please don't question me, Andrew. Let's go."

"I've never said I'm coming."

"But you must." She put a hand lightly on my arm and the mere touch almost undid me. I felt I'd do anything to please. "I haven't told you the whole story."

"Then tell me now," I said.

"It's too horrible."

"You won't scare me into coming."

"He doesn't mean just to kill you. They've gone right back to the most primitive and savage practices. You'd be—I can't say it."

She made my blood run cold. And at the same time a twinge of suspicion, like the first action of some gut-corroding poison, had disturbed my mind. I repeated, "Why should Roland tell you all this?"

"I ask you to believe me, Andrew. If you think anything of me at all, come back with me now to Luala."

"On what terms?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know very well what I mean." But she evaded me, wouldn't look at me, wouldn't respond, and I had to press home the point that only two nights ago—it seemed a century—she'd either loved me or pretended to, and now I might have been a man she'd once sat next to in a railway coach.

"I came up here to warn you," she protested.

"You'd do that for an old family friend."

"Andrew, I wish you'd try to understand. What's the use of going on with something that will lead nowhere? I'm going back to Stanleyville and then goodness knows where, I shan't see you again. We'll only make ourselves miserable if we—Oh, do come back with me now. Can't you see that you've blundered into something that's right out of your depth . . . ? I'll make a bargain with you. Leave this place, and I'll persuade Zuk to let you come to Stanleyville with us tomorrow. I'm sure he'll agree."

This silenced me, and set the blood pounding in my head. To be with Gemma, not just for a snatched hour or two but for several days, perhaps weeks even; to escape from this mess in which I'd landed myself; to be finished with Roland

and all his works; above all (it came back to that) to have Gemma close enough to touch and to watch and to make love to—it was irresistible. As for Clausen, he was not my business, and in any case what could I do? Help him to decide if he was mad or sane, deluded or objective, a murderer or the victim of hallucinations? Even if, against all odds, I managed to reach the rock; even if, against all probabilities, I managed to return from it; even if all this should come about, Clausen was a broken man. The strain and the uncertainty had finished him. His life was over, mine still young, and something might come of it yet—with Gemma. And so the choice wasn't hard to make after all. I asked her first, "Is that a promise?"

"Of course."

"All right, then, I accept."

It was so still that I heard a child cry across the valley. The moment of quiescence that falls at evening in the tropics had spread over the land. It was as if the earth and all its people paused between day and night, the women setting down their waterpots by the doorway, the men stretching out their hands to the wood fire, the full-cropped birds settling into the sheltering branches. A few lights winked through a purple dusk from fires lit in the open, a few stars began to pierce the violet-blue sky. Outside, I could just see the shape of Zuk's big car, in which the driver patiently waited, smoking.

I asked Gemma to wait while I wrote a note to Rivière, whose houseboy at that moment, just when he was wanted, brought a lamp into the living room. Under the eye of Rivière's wife and progeny, framed on the desk, I began to write a note of apology which I knew he'd welcome. No one wanted me here.

Beside the desk stood a bookcase, and the top shelf held a

row of Clausen's works, five or six volumes—he isn't a prolific writer—looking well-thumbed. On impulse, I pulled one down and opened it; several silver fishes darted out and vanished under the spine. They were eating Clausen's words of wisdom but growing no wiser—like the human race, I thought. I read a paragraph, and the measured words, the style combining grace with sincerity, behind it the urgent honesty, the thoroughness, the refusal to chase consoling shadows—all this brought Clausen back before me as clearly as if he stood in the room. In fact, he *did* seem to stand there, looking leonine, bewildered, desperate and noble, as he'd looked in the library; and his eyes seemed on me, and he put out one hand as if to keep me from withdrawing, as if to implore my help.

A hallucination of course—and gone in the wink of an eye; there was the book in my hand, the desk, the photograph of Rivière's family. Yet things were altered. I knew that I'd all but made an irreparable mistake, and was grateful for the warning. I am, after all, a Scot and obstinate; those of my forebears transported to the West Indies two centuries ago (there are black Colquhouns today, descendants of Highland slaves) hadn't chosen the path of safety; nor had my elder brother, who had gone down with his frigate on convoy duty.

But even so I compromised—at least, I cheated. There was one thing I wouldn't give up at any price, and I broke my word to get it. I crumpled the piece of paper on which I'd written "Dear Rivière" and started on a fresh piece: "Dear Mr. Zukermann. Miss Kreiss is spending the night at M. Rivière's at Bamili. If you will send the car for her in the morning she will be ready to return to Luala. Yours truly, A. Colquhoun." Then I went out to the car, gave the note and my instructions to the driver and watched the big black

car glide away. Zuk would lose a few hours of his valuable big-business time; I'd gain—what? The chance, at least, to put it to the touch, to gain or lose it all.

Gemma met me in the sitting room with an expression suggesting that I had lost my stake before the game began. She can assume a very wintry look.

"What have you done?"

"You saw what I've done." This was no moment for long, futile explanations. "The car will come back for you tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, it's very comfortable here." Then my nerve did begin to crack, I almost started to apologize, and added, "I can't come back with you, Gemma, either tonight or tomorrow. I wanted to, but I can't. This may be the last time that we shall be together."

She stood for a few moments very tense, looking at me with a queer sort of concentration—it could have been hatred, then again it could have been something else, buried under a great deal of self-control.

"No, it's a mistake," she said, but not angrily, flatly rather, as if the situation had defeated her. Just as I stepped towards her, the houseboy brought in a burning brand to light the fire. And after the houseboy, to my discomfiture, came Elizabeth, who stood in the lamplight looking at me steadily and said:

"Why didn't you come to see me? I have some news."

"I've been busy." The feeblest, stupidest of answers, and there I was on the defensive, in a hopeless position, conscious of Gemma's surprise.

"You have a visitor." Elizabeth looked full at Gemma in a way that I can only describe as saucy, and Gemma looked at her with an old-fashioned distaste.

"What do you want?"

"I want to speak to you alone."

Without daring even to look at Gemma, and scarlet probably with embarrassment, I practically pushed her out of the room on to the back veranda.

"Why does Gemma come here?" she asked. "Gemma is not your friend. She is the friend of Dr. Roland."

I'm afraid that I swore at her, then.

"Perhaps you do not wish to hear what I have found?" she asked, stung out of her infuriating archness. "Do you wish to go to the mole's burrow, or are you busy like the ram with his flock?"

I'd have struck her for two pins, but managed to restrain such foolishness and eventually learnt that she'd made friends with the cook and his wife, who are not local people but come from Fort Lamy and are Moslems, and despise these pagan Congo tribes. They have a son, a lad of fourteen or so, who claims to know the path to the rock—or at any rate its beginning, if not its end. "He says there are two paths," she added. "One from here, the other from Luala. He knows both. He will show them to you if you make him a promise."

"Which is?"

"That you will take him with you to Stanleyville. He does not wish to stay here."

"How do you know he's on the level?"

She looked at me as if she didn't understand.

"He might be cheating," I explained.

She shrugged her shoulders. "You asked me to help you find this path. I have done so. What is my reward?"

"What do you want?"

"I go with you to Stanleyville."

"Well, it'll be quite a party," I said. "Mr. Zuckermann is in for a surprise."

Elizabeth slipped quietly from the veranda without an-

other word. She's disgruntled. A woman scorned? Have I accepted with too much credulity her rôle of the wronged lady fleeing from the cruel lover? Has James, at Roland's instigation, put her up to all this?

Well, I thought, what if he has? This boy can lead me tomorrow night into a trap; if he doesn't, I shall blunder into it anyway; all the same I have my own plan of campaign and shall trust to a combination of luck, judgment and a kind of instinct which has helped me several times on this journey, and is not to be despised.

I came back to find the atmosphere of the room heavy with anger and, I'd have almost said, with hatred, though perhaps it was something more akin to disgust. Some people can surround themselves with an envelope of emotion, like a squid that gives off an inky substance when it's alarmed or upset. You can tell as soon as you enter the room. Is it a question of posture—the set of the shoulders, the angle of the head? Or some gland exuding the hint of a smell? Or a kind of telepathy? Whatever it is, I knew at once that Gemma's heart was enraged.

She was sitting in an easy chair by the newly kindled fire. I sat down opposite, resolved to make no excuses, and told her the truth: that Elizabeth had found me a guide to Bamili Rock.

Gemma made no reply, she didn't even look at me. She sat in heavy silence refusing to say the things I knew were seething in her mind, the bitter, angry things; and indeed my behaviour must have seemed outrageous. And then I thought: it *is* outrageous, I hadn't the shadow of a right to reject her appeal, virtually to kidnap her person, to throw her kindness in her face and then, on top of it all, to produce (as it were) Elizabeth without a word of explanation—it was too much. And so, in the face of all my intentions and resolves, I started to explain and apologize. I knew this would



lead to no good but I did it, feeling weak and a fool. It put her in the false position of judge and jury and myself in the ignominious one of the prisoner at the bar. So I stumbled on until I got to Elizabeth, when Gemma interrupted abruptly and said that all this had nothing whatever to do with her; I was wasting my breath; I could bring twenty Elizabeths if I liked to Bamili: what was the need to explain?

"But you know about James Gichini," I pleaded. "He's the man I came here with from Juba, in Roland's car."

"And therefore you believe implicitly what this woman tells you?"

"She helped me when I was beaten up."

"Can't you understand anything?"

"I don't know what to think." And really I was getting desperate: and so I said, "Even about you and Roland."

She laughed. "Is that worrying you?"

"Why should he tell you his intentions? Or did you find out by accident?" She was silent, looking into the fire. "There's something between you, isn't there?"

She said, "More than you think."

"My God! How can you sit there—" And then I stopped, appalled at the cauldron of prejudice and bigotry in my own mind into which I was suddenly gazing. All the emotions I thought I'd long ago outgrown or never suffered from, the mean, stupid, uncivilized jealousies and spites that other people might have, but not me, lay there horribly revealed. I tried to swallow back the venom, I repeated to myself over and over that Gemma was no more accountable to me than to the Grand Cham of Tartary; both of us were free; already I'd injured her freedom and she had borne with me patiently; I must hold my peace lest the damage become irreparable.

And here we were, on the brink of an acrimonious, hopeless quarrel when we were alone in each other's company

for the second time in our lives and probably the last: when there was stretched between us the web of something greater than indifference, even if it was less than love.

I said, "I've landed us both in a ridiculous position and I'm very sorry—but that does no good now. Meanwhile, here we are; Rivière's got a first-class cook and certainly some wine; tomorrow, God knows where we'll be. Well, then, let's declare a moratorium until nine o'clock tomorrow, and simply enjoy ourselves in an old-fashioned way."

"You make a point of taking unfair advantages," Gemma answered.

"They seem to be the only ones I can get."

"I've never in my life met anyone so obstinate."

"And I've never in my life met anyone so beautiful."

"Don't!" she protested. "It doesn't suit you to be insincere."

"But I'm not—"

"Must we always argue? Look, I've brought something for you."

Alas! It wasn't a delicacy we could have enjoyed with our dinner, say a bottle of an excellent liqueur, but something far less attractive: a pistol, which she extracted from her bag.

"I detest those things," I said.

"That's not a very realistic attitude."

"No—an old-fashioned one, I suppose."

"Will you take it, if only to please me?"

"For no other reason."

I put it in my pocket reluctantly; I know it's a stupid foible that she touched upon, and that guns can be as necessary as bread or water; it's not even a matter of principle with me; there just seem to be too many guns about and I feel safer without one, in a curious way. When I took it, one of those sensations came over me that I sometimes get:

premonitions possibly, or merely baseless aversions, who knows? I felt as convinced as I am that I'm sitting here now, at Rivière's desk, writing these words, that this pistol was an object of ill omen and that through its agency some great harm would be done, and I had to exert all my will power to take it from Gemma.

"I'll let you have it back," I said, thinking that we'd come a long way since a lady's favour was a lace-edged scented handkerchief; now it was a Colt automatic, and no nonsense, either, about mother-of-pearl butts.

"You can keep it as a souvenir," she replied, smiling at the same thought, and after that our truce was observed.

I can't write much about last night: there's no time, for one thing, and, for another, what can one say about an evening that's lifted right out of the ordinary level and seems to exist on another plane? It wouldn't be correct to say that I forgot my fears—I buried them, and the very fact that they were there underneath, not dead but sleeping, deepened our delight.

It was a cheerful evening. Rivière's cook produced a superb meal, the houseboy, unasked, a bottle of claret, and afterwards, by the fireside, we sat over coffee and liqueurs. When the houseboy (a perfect servant) explained that he had laid out one of Mme. Rivière's nightgowns it didn't even sound embarrassing, in French. Later, I told Gemma that I'd sleep in the dressing room if she wanted me to; and she said:

"That's not how either of us meant the evening to end. But first, I want you to make me a promise."

"Of course," I agreed.

"Don't follow me to Stanleyville. After tonight, don't try to see me again."

"That's ridiculous!"

"I mean it, Andrew."

I hadn't the heart to start an argument, and so I gave the promise, telling myself that Gemma must know as well as I did how little it meant. But why this insistence, why this repudiation of the ordinary course of events? The mystery bothered me for a while, but I soon forgot it, and after that there was nothing between us but love.

Sometime in the night, when we were both awake, she told me that she couldn't keep the truth from me any longer. Drowsily, I tried to stop her; I wanted nothing, no thoughts even, to come between us now; let all that wait. But she said:

"I've got to tell you, now or never."

"Never, then."

"It's about Roland."

I jerked away from her, stung by a revulsion which amounted almost to nausea. Even in this moment of peace and satiety that name had to intrude and shatter my happiness. I swore at the man.

"No, it's not what you think," Gemma said.

"Why do you have to tell me?"

"Because I love you," she said.

Even those words couldn't now soothe me, so strong was the distaste Roland's name had aroused, and the apprehension.

"For God's sake let's finish with these mysteries!" I exclaimed.

And so she went back to her engagement to that English major who jilted her almost at the church door. And even then I was slow to see the point.

"My father came up to meet him a week before the wedding. He and Roger hadn't met before."

"Well?"

"Roger wrote the next day. I suppose it was as nice a

letter as one could expect in the circumstances, but he said he wouldn't marry me. Then he went away."

"After he saw your *father*? I don't understand. He's not an ape man or something, is he? A retired murderer. or a well-known spy?"

"Not quite. But, Andrew, he's . . ."

Even now, in the intimate darkness, lying close against me, she couldn't bring herself to get it out.

"He—looks different," she whispered. "I'd forgotten how different till I saw him again."

Then, at last, I did understand, and could say nothing, but instead I held her tightly, half inclined to laugh and half to cry; she was so abominably pathetic, nursing this raw wound, this festering bitter secret which appeared to me to have no importance at all.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"All? Don't you see it makes me . . . what did they use to call it? A touch of the tar-brush!"

She muttered rather than spoke the words with a gritty defiance that went to my heart; the uncovering of this long-buried shame had hurt her wickedly. Her body was tense with the effort, and I took her in my arms and began to make love to her again. But she turned her head away.

"Wait, that isn't everything."

I implored her not to waste more time in talk, for over half the night had gone.

"Listen, Andrew. You've got to know. My father was born in Cairo. His mother was Irish, but his father was a Sudanese."

"It sounds a fascinating cross," I said. "Innisfail and Araby."

"Wait. My father had a sister, and she married an African. They had children, I don't know how many—three-

quarters black they'd be. Whereas I'm only one quarter and it doesn't show unless you look for it, you see."

"How can it matter!" I exclaimed, and held her close, and thought hard, for by now I'd realized what she was trying to tell me and finding it so difficult to say.

"So Roland is your cousin," I at last remarked.

"Yes."

"Have you known it long?"

"I never even thought about it until Zuk was talking that night to Rivière in the resthouse—do you remember? He said that Roland's mother had been the daughter of an Irish nurse and a Sudanese doctor in Cairo. It came to me in a flash that there couldn't possibly be two such families. It stunned me completely, I had to get out of the room."

"Does Roland know?"

"He does now."

"You mean you told him?"

"I had to, because I wanted him to talk. It was the only way I could do it. I got him curious, and dangled answers in front of him, and it worked."

"You did that for me."

"I had to know. And, Andrew, he—"

"Quiet!" I put my hand over her mouth. "We're breaking our truce—in fact we've broken it already. All this belongs to tomorrow."

"But I had to tell you, because . . ."

"Because what?"

She moved in the bed restively, half-disengaging herself from my arms; even the exorcising of her demon hadn't satisfied her.

"Because you wanted to follow me to Stanleyville," she said.

"Of course I did. I shall, too."

"You promised not to."

"That was before you told me all this. D'you think I should care if you were a Hottentot? You are you, I am I, that's all. Even Dr. Roland . . ."

"Well?"

"I must admit he wouldn't be my choice as a cousin-in-law. But if he becomes the Cæsar of Africa, I shall have the consolation of being very well-connected."

"But that's it! We can never—"

"Darling," I said, "do let's stop talking; you've told me about the mountain you've built from a molehill and if it could make me love you any more than I do already, it would. Let's forget about it now until tomorrow."

But she was crying, so I had to tell her, resignedly, that we'd better have it out.

"Don't you understand anything?" she cried.

"I know I'm rather dense."

"If one gets fond of a person, one's liable to want to marry them."

"Not quite as dense as that. There hasn't been much time to talk about it and it's rather premature to fix a date. But we shall."

"But don't you understand? That I can never marry?"

"Well, I am being dense now," I said.

She sighed. "There's not much point in marrying without children, is there?"

"I'm not so sure about that. But we'll have to settle down eventually and then we can have one or two."

"I can't have any children," she said very quietly into the pillow.

"You mean there's something wrong with you?"

"I've told you what's wrong."

"But that's nothing to do with having babies."

"You don't take it easy, do you," she said, with a twinge

of irritation. "Can't you understand? They might be—black."

This final effort to speak what all her life had been unspeakable exhausted her and she lay stiff and inert and scarcely seeming to breathe—so small, so slight, as if she had shrunk to another dimension.

"That's nonsense," I said.

"It happens sometimes."

"Obviously you don't know anything about genetics."

"Oh, Andrew, you must see . . ."

This was a queer time and place to deliver a lecture on the principles of Mendelian inheritance, but it seemed unavoidable.

"Pigmentation's a recessive character and you could only have a black baby—really coal-black, I mean— if you married a man who carried the same gene. So far as I know, I don't."

"It's no good talking like that. It's happened before."

"In another moment," I said, "I shall have to start on dwarf and wrinkled peas. Tomorrow I'll do it with a pencil and paper. Oh, Gemma, you must believe me, all this time you've been worrying about nothing but an old wives' tale!"

Even then she only half accepted it, but let me comfort her. Later on I thought aloud:

"That English major was a bloody fool."

"You mean Roger?"

"He threw a pearl away, richer than all his tribe."

"I'm glad now," Gemma said.

I had expected Zuk's car to come back for her before nine o'clock, but it didn't. We waited all the morning, half-worried, half-grateful for these extra hours—an unexpected bonus, a queer interlude. At about eleven o'clock I sug-



gested to Gemma that she should drive down in my old hireling, but she said:

"Most likely Zuk has gone to Stanleyville and left a note giving me the sack. Then what should I do in Lua?"

"Better stay here, for the time being."

"Rivière will be back this afternoon. Perhaps he'll run me down and see what's happened. Unless . . ."

I knew what was coming, and held my tongue.

"Andrew, please—come with me!"

"We've been into all that."

"Haven't things changed a bit?"

"They've changed wonderfully. But—" I tried once more to explain about Clausen and she tried to understand, unsuccessfully.

"If it's your life or his peace of mind, how can you hesitate? Why should he matter so much to you?"

"It isn't that." I stumbled over the words and failed miserably. How can one ever explain these things? That it wasn't Clausen at issue but my own self-esteem? And Roland, too. More than ever now he sticks in my gullet, less than ever can I turn tail and leave him in possession of the field. And perhaps it is, after all, as Gemma says, just my bloody obstinacy.

We sat on the veranda after lunch, looking down on to the tops of trees in the valley. A purple-breasted waxbill hopped about within a stone's throw, almost tame, absorbed in the never-ending hunt for food. Under the roof of leaves, far below, an invisible commotion stirred the branches: perhaps some difference of opinion in the monkey world. The sunshine was bright, the heat oppressive and, behind us, big dark thunderclouds were starting to mass together for the afternoon's assault.

I might even at this eleventh hour have given way had not the boy who was to guide me appeared and asked to

speaking to me. He's different from the local folk, a sharper, more sophisticated type who's received the benefit of a city education and finds his present exile unendurable. He'll do anything, even approach Bamili Rock, for a chance to get back to the city.

Is this boy also an agent of Roland's? Through a double-crossing Elizabeth? It's possible, certainly. But I doubt it. Both have motives which I think are stronger than fear of Roland, or loyalty to him, or membership in his movement, strong though these can be. I shall risk it, anyway. I have to.

We fixed a plan. The boy, Tèpé, is to lead me not to Bamili Rock itself but to the path, and not to the path from which I was deflected yesterday but to the other, the one that comes up from Lua-la. If Roland intends to have me ambushed, it will surely be on the path I tried to find yesterday. The Lua-la route will be well-trodden when night falls. My intention is to join the throng in the darkness, if this is feasible; if not, to keep myself hidden. There's plenty of cover, one can be invisible at a few yards.

The boy Tèpé is to wait for me at a safe distance near the path and, when I've seen all I want to, lead me back to Lua-la. The search will be concentrated, I reckon, on the other path, the shorter one leading to Bamili station.

That's the plan: a very simple one, but I don't see why I shouldn't get away with it if luck's on my side. To find a man in this thick bush and forest would be like catching a flea on a tiger.

There is, of course, one major obstacle—Rivière, and his resolve that I shan't leave the station. An obstacle that may remove itself, for Rivière has not yet returned from his safari. It's dark now, and the houseboy thinks he won't be back until tomorrow. "Perhaps the chief could not be found," he said. "Perhaps they came to a swollen river. Many things can happen."

So Rivière's dealt with—and Gemma gone. When Zuk's car hadn't come by three o'clock I persuaded her to take my hired Citroën and drive down to Luala. She made conditions: I had to tell her my general plan.

"Where does the bottom of the path emerge from the forest at Luala?" she asked. I said I didn't know exactly—somewhere near Clausen's camp, I supposed.

"Who does know the actual place?"

"Practically everyone, but no one will say."

"I'll find out, somehow. Then I'll take the car there and sit in it until you arrive."

"I'll be very late," I protested.

"I can wait."

"You can't stay there all night. It won't be safe."

"I'll take someone with me. And I'll tell Chris where I've gone."

She was resolute, and I knew I couldn't turn her if she'd made up her mind.

"There's a further possibility." This was a suggestion I had no need to amplify.

"If you haven't come by daybreak I shall drive back here and get Rivière to organize a search."

"Rivière may not be back either."

"Well, I shall do something. Luala's on the telegraph."

"Take Xenophon," I suggested. "He knows the path, I think, and he's not one of Roland's men. But I wish you wouldn't do it, Gemma."

She took my hand. "There wouldn't be any need, if you—Is it any use my asking you once more? With all my heart and soul?"

"It's all arranged now." A feeble excuse! I loathed myself for going against her; but there it was; I'd made up my mind. And I was right, fundamentally. If, at the last minute, I'd cried off, things would have been spoilt between us in

the long run. I'd have had twenty, thirty years to call myself a coward and the very name of Clausen would have been an endless misery.

"When we get away from here," Gemma said, "let's lead a very quiet life."

"Surburban," I agreed.

"A small farm in a closely settled area with a town close by, a golf course and a good road."

"Lots of neighbours, retired people mostly, and a radio set," I added. "We might learn bridge."

"I'm not sure about the bridge. You're so pig-headed."

"Well, then, Canasta. I'm no good at cards."

"I ought to be going," Gemma said.

"Yes. I'll fetch the car."

The Citroën wouldn't start, and we had to push it downhill. One might almost have imagined that our reluctance, mine and Gemma's, had communicated itself to the machinery. But it did start eventually, and then I had to persuade Elizabeth to go back with Gemma. It seemed the only thing to do with her, I couldn't leave her as a present for Rivière. She didn't want to go, but agreed when we promised that Gemma would find her a billet at the SMAC rest-house, so she could avoid James. I feel satisfied myself that she, at least, like Xenophon, is not on Roland's side.

So that's it. Gemma's gone, Rivière hasn't returned, all I can do now is to await the darkness. The afternoon thunderstorm has broken back in the hills. Here, only a spatter of rain has fallen, but the sky is full of angry charcoal clouds and thunder rolls like a thousand war drums up and down the ridges and valleys. Luala, I think, is in sunshine: Gemma should have no trouble getting back. This may be my last entry. I shall leave this diary here. If all goes well, I shall return to collect it; Rivière will find it if things go wrong. I hadn't intended anyone to see it: I wrote it for the record,

and to help me with Clausen's biography, and for practice in putting words on paper. But if tonight's expedition should turn out badly, I'd like Rivière to read it (he will have, anyway, if he gets as far as this). It will tell him all I know about Roland, and a little about the puzzle of Clausen. No one will ever be able to explain that fully—but then no one can ever explain why any human being behaves just as he does. Expensible but not explicable—the human condition in four words.

It's very quiet and peaceful now. The waxbill actually flew on to the veranda and collared an ant. The women's evening trek for water has begun. (They still use local home-made pots here, not the ubiquitous four-gallon tin.) It seems so gentle, innocent, and normal. Perhaps I've imagined all the rest. Perhaps I shall come back to a sleeping station to finish the night quietly in bed.



# Postscript

## 1

Two years have gone by since I wrote those words in Rivière's bungalow with the spatter of rain on the roof and the sound of thunder in my ears, wondering if they were the last I ever should write. For two years I've struggled constantly to shut out of my mind the events that followed. So much so, I couldn't bring myself to think of them at all when I was conscious; my mind had decided for itself, and my thoughts would skirt that cataclysmic night as a fox will pick its way around a trap smelling of danger. It was only at night that visions returned to me, as if a corner of some curtain had been lifted and the shapes behind begun to emerge; even then, the prohibition functioned and I'd wake up sweating and sometimes (Gemma said) talking in my sleep and shouting at the shapes to keep away.

I'd sworn never again to recall these things, never to ask myself the final questions, never to reconstruct or probe. To let them lie undisturbed, like a pond with reeds and duckweed that looks greenly back at you and conceals goodness knows what skeletons and ordure and secret forms of light-shunning existence. Best not to throw a stone in, best not to stir up mud. The mystery of Bamili Rock remains a mystery and no one knows the solution. I would have left it at that.

But now that I have come back (for the moment) to my starting point, Gemma has asked me to put it all down. To drag it up, to dredge the pond, complete the record and clear my own system, Gemma says; to lay the ghosts and then

forget. A purge. Will it work? Perhaps: time heals all; yet there's a lot of scar tissue over this particular wound. But I will do as she says, if I can.

## 2

Well, then, to go back: back to Rivière's veranda in that pleasant, aromatic little forest station and to the last good meal I was to eat for a long, long time. It was served by Rivière's houseboy in a living room full of possessions that emanated the essence of Rivière: his books, the photo of his wife and children, the native carvings every administrator collects, the vivid, slapdash oil sketches on the wall of scenes and characters unmistakably French, perhaps of his native haunts around St. Seine l'Abbaye. Mme. Rivière had left her imprint, too—a piece of embroidery stretched on a frame and pushed into a corner, a frivolous-looking knitting bag, a plastic raincoat and fishnet shopping-bag hanging on a door-peg.

The cook's boy, Tèpé, soon arrived, looking shrivelled with anxiety, yet resolved: his vision of the school, the city, the glittering future that awaited the sophisticate just sustained him. Only just; he knew that he must venture into darkness in more senses than one, and I was visited with qualms about my right to enlist him; but it was too late to worry now. He suggested, in his schoolboy French (better than mine), that I should make my face less conspicuous. I dislike play-acting, but supposed that this was sensible, only I had no ideas beyond burnt cork.

Tèpé vanished and reappeared with a fistful of charcoal which I rubbed over my face. It did the trick; I looked like a miner coming off shift. Queer, how the whites of one's eyes show up unexpectedly. Tèpé's father had cut me some sandwiches, as if I'd been going on a picnic, or a bird-watching jaunt. I had nothing else, much, except the pistol and a



knife and pocket compass; and by a lucky chance—a sort of instinct, possibly?—I slipped into my pocket the last thing I expected to need, a pair of sunglasses. Thank God I did.

It was a dark night, of course—chosen for that reason, no moon; but the thunderclouds had rolled away and the sky was prickly with stars. Soon I could see nothing of them, or of any other source of light. The blackness of the forest was absolutely unrelieved. I realized for the first time since childhood how frightening the real dark, the absolute dark, can be, and how seldom one encounters it. Confronted by it, one's mind conceives of it as solid, tangible and vindictive. This was the darkness of the closed and locked cupboard, the dungeon, in which one blunders with the desperate impotence of a blind grub. Branches, twigs, creepers tore at my body, slapped my face, clung to me with a horribly sinister embrace, and my feet slipped continually on the wet path. Cascades of raindrops drenched my neck and shoulders and soon I was wet through.

*"Allez doucement, doucement,"* Tèpé kept saying. Stupid advice, when I couldn't see an inch ahead; yet Tèpé managed to tread far more softly than I.

Soon we branched off the path we had been following, which I imagine led straight to Bamili Rock, and plunged into undergrowth far more inimical. Fallen logs, thorns, a tangle of matted vegetation obstructed my feet at every step and I had to force a passage with my arms held in front of my face.

"You've lost the way," I whispered angrily to Tèpé—even he could not now proceed without disturbance.

*"Non, non, c'est un sentier du gibier,"* Tèpé whispered back. *"Il faut ramper."* It very nearly was a case of crawling, too, at any rate of walking doubled up, one's feet continually slithering. And the darkness itself seemed an alive, sentient, abominably hostile thing.

We slid down a steep incline and paddled across a stream. For the first time a gleam of light came through, I saw a glimpse of stars overhead and the water had a colour—no, not a colour, a substance and existence of its own. I could see movement, enormously reassuring. In my apprehensive, keyed-up state I had almost believed myself to be blind. We clambered up a sloping bank, hanging on to tree roots; at the top, I was so blown that I laid a hand on Tépé's shoulder to stop him. We stood there in the darkness together, panting and sweating—myself far more than this thin, hard-muscled boy. Was he as frightened, I wondered, as I? Cold as well as hot? A curious sensation. As we stood there, I heard something indefinable: a very soft, long-drawn-out throb, a distant mutter as from the huge throat of some half-dormant and wholly threatening animal. I held my breath and prickled all over, hair, spine, shoulders, everything: a primordial, surging panic. This was the breathing of the ogre that has terrified every child since time began. I couldn't for the world have spoken a word, but Tépé felt me stiffen, and the bite of my fingers into his shoulder.

*"Les tambours,"* he said.

I might have known it, but the sound didn't seem like drums. None of the rat-a-tat-tat we think of, the brisk arousing military tattoo; nothing like that at all; something slow, low, continuous, half-heard and half-apprehended: a thickening of the atmosphere, a threat, a mutter, an inexorable, advancing footstep of vengeance, a breath of guilt, the very pulse of night itself. A sound like no other; one can't describe it. I can only say that forest drummers know of a secret affinity between the finger tip, the membrane and the blood, and use it to strike the deepest terror, the most wordless fear, into the bone's very marrow. An inhuman sound, so gentle, so regular, so elemental and so utterly compelling that it pierces to the very root of the mind. With the anaes-

thetic of fear it paralyzes the source of morality. It throbs in the blood like an old wound. It dries the mouth and weakens the bowels. It is something that has come down to us from our ancient origins in forest and swamp and that still keeps its power over man in the darkness, and in danger, and alone.

Tèpé also felt its potency. While the drums softly muttered, both of us stood as rooted as trees. Then they stopped, and we breathed deeply, and very cautiously advanced again. I was cold with sweat.

"Bamili Rock," I said, not asking—meaning merely to make the drums more substantial by allotting to them a geographical position.

"*Les tambours du diable*," Tèpé murmured. He crept more slowly and I suspected that, if I had not been just behind him, he would have turned tail. And so should I, if I had dared to show my funk before this French-speaking boy. Queer, how we give each other courage, as chickens impart mutual warmth.

The drums started up again. This time we kept going and by an effort of the will erected a kind of screen of unspoken words between sound and impulse—at least I did; not so much a screen of thought as just of nonsense. I kept repeating to myself, "They sought it with thimbles, they sought it with care; they pursued it with forks and hope; they threatened its life with a railway-share; they charmed it with smiles and soap."

I didn't allow myself to think of the pay-off: that last unfinished shriek, that sudden vanishment, that terribly sinister ending: "For the Snark *was* a Boojum, you see." I was approaching the Boojum, I had got to look at it and nothing seemed more likely than that I should suddenly, if not softly, vanish away, leaving not a button, or feather, or mark.

## 3

These exertions nearly ditched us both, for we had closed our ears not only to the drums but, partially, to other sounds as well. All of a sudden I heard a half-gasp from Tèpé and stumbled into him as he stopped dead in his tracks. Then came a sound just ahead, not more than five or six paces: a human voice. It sounded like a bellow in my ear, although it didn't speak loudly; another voice answered; two men—at least two—were moving through the darkness almost close enough to touch.

For a moment I thought that they were coming down the game-path towards us and half-turned to run for it, but Tèpé gripped my arm; we stood immobile; the sounds of people moving filled our ears. The voice spoke again and it had moved a little further off. What had happened was now clear. We'd reached the junction of our game-track with the path leading from Luala to Bamili Rock. And now the clans were gathering at the rock and the heard but unseen men were travellers to the scene.

The sounds made by the two men in motion gradually grew fainter and died away to our left, the direction in which the rock lay. Soon we could hear someone else approaching. It was hard to say exactly what one heard: not footsteps, not, this time, voices, not a crashing through the undergrowth. One just heard sounds, but not until their makers were a few yards away. It was remarkable how quietly the people were travelling. I saw, I thought, a red eye winking at me through the branches—a wink and it was gone. I felt as if my blood had turned to whey. A few moments later, a faint, familiar smell insinuated itself into my nostrils, filled already with the dank, musty odour of fungi and tree trunks and the tang of wet leaves. Tobacco smoke. Extraordinary how eerie a commonplace smell like that can be in such circum-

stances. A mute threat hangs about it, like the odour of decay.

Had Clausen, I wondered, already passed that way? Had he toiled up the path with hunched shoulders in his fear, and the doubt which was worse than fear, going to his doom or his release? Had Roland, with his quick, nimble movements, Roland the devil's impressario, had he already answered the summons? And James Gichini, who for this had come a thousand miles? Were we late, or early? It was time to go.

We reached the proper path. Here the forest became thinner. Overhead, as if at the end of a long tunnel, I could see a fine dust of stars. The muttering of the drums was imperceptibly thickening, their beat speeding up; they had entered my blood like a poison and seemed to be sucking me along.

I started up the hill, but Tèpé stood aside and murmured in my ear that he had come far enough, he was going home. "*Bonne chance, monsieur,*" he added and we touched hands; without more ado, he disappeared. For a few seconds I could hear his stealthy progress down the game-path, then silence flooded back and I was alone.

The path led uphill. Now and again I stumbled into a branch or log and scratched my face or barked my shins, but I was getting better at progressing in the dark. A sort of sixth sense, like a bat's radar, does develop after a while. I'm sure that some of the Africans possess it very strongly—it's more than extra sharp eyes.

Tèpé, young as he was, had given me a bit of confidence; he was at least a companion, a friend. Now I knew that every human being I encountered would be an enemy and one who'd meet me on his own ground. It was not a cosy feeling at all. Most of us go through life without an idea of what it feels like to be hunted. The frightening thing (at

least this was my reaction) isn't so much the threat to one's own life as the shock of realization that fellow human beings who, in civilized conditions, and without realizing it, one regards instinctively as brothers (even if repellent ones) can be impervious to all feelings of humanity and as utterly, as implacably hostile as creatures of another species—and infinitely more cruel, because they take pleasure in cruelty. It's a feeling those behind the Iron Curtain must know well, but from which most of us are always sheltered.

The drums seemed to get no nearer, although I knew I must be approaching the rock; then, all of a sudden, they stopped. The silence was like a blanket thrown over my face; the blood pounded and throbbed. Why couldn't I see something, know what was happening? I had lost all sense of time and place.

Then I heard voices behind my back. More people advancing towards the rock; they were speaking in low tones in a tongue I couldn't understand. I stepped aside. They went past no more than a yard away and I tried to squeeze myself into nothing, certain that they couldn't fail to hear my heart, to smell my fear. One of them—a sick man?—was walking heavily and slipping now and then on the path. I heard one say, "Eeee," in that long drawn exclamation of comment or agreement so many Africans use, then something else, and then the word "Vuko." The leader hawked and spat.

As soon as I judged the last of them—I think they numbered four—to have drawn about ten paces ahead, I slipped into the path and followed. That was part of my plan. To hear someone just behind wouldn't arouse suspicion, Bamili Rock was drawing so many people tonight. The danger was that one of them might call out some challenge or greeting. I had to risk that.

At first, my plan worked. The men ahead of me did not

keep silent, but exchanged remarks now and then. We climbed steadily, and soon I noticed that the darkness was becoming a little less tangible and intense, less like black treacle; dimly, I could see the bulky shapes of trees. And then ahead I saw again a red eye winking—two, three, several red eyes, ahead and above. Fires. Against them I could see black silhouettes of trunks and twigs. I had reached the nucleus of events, the rock so sacred and so sinister.

## 4

I had better explain the lie of the land. So far as I could make out—I never saw the place in daylight—the rock stands at the summit of a long slope, surrounded by forest, but the trees and undergrowth don't grow right up to the rock-face; whether naturally, or by man's hand, a small clearing encircles the base. On the side from which I approached, the rock-face rises, I should say, thirty or forty feet, quite sheer. A path leads around and under it and climbs up to the back. By means of this, one can attain the top of the rock itself, which occupies a platform about, say, twice as large as a tennis court. (Rough judgments, these, made in darkness.)

The fires were on top of the rock, and I could see people moving about there, making preparations, I suppose. To look up at these fires, great red and orange stars in the blackness of the firmament, was impressive and wonderful. Their light didn't reach us where we stood, but I could sense that the clearing in front of the rock-face was full of people. The silence of the drums continued, but voices muttered softly like a stream. I leant against a tree trunk, confident in my invisibility. And then a voice spoke, very gently, right into my ear.

"Good evening, Mr. Colquhoun."

The tone was silky, confidential, almost caressing. I knew

the voice, all right, but couldn't answer, and my feet were frozen to the ground. It added:

"You have come to see our show?"

I thought of blustering, of commanding, of attempting to return a normal answer to a remark that could have been taken for a friendly greeting; after all, I was infringing no law; I had a right to be here; moreover, Rivière would know where I had gone. We were living in the twentieth century. I told myself these things, and tried to bring my dry throat, my pounding heart, my singing ears under control. I managed to say, "I hope you have no objection."

Roland said, "I was expecting you."

There seemed to be no answer to that and I wondered whether I hadn't, after all, been an hysterical fool; whether I couldn't have walked up here without any palaver, whether I wasn't as safe as if I'd gone to watch the changing of the guard. Had Roland, perhaps, decided to put up with my blundering curiosity? I asked, "Is Dr. Clausen here?"

"I will take you to him, Mr. Colquhoun."

There was a mocking note in his tone. His face was invisible.

"This way. You must be careful of the path," he added. "It is a little treacherous."

He moved off, and I followed: even if it were to the slaughter, I had no alternative. I heard a man breathing at my back. A stalwart figure, two perhaps, marched behind. No escape.

Roland climbed quickly, I had to concentrate to keep up, the path was rough and stony. But we were in the open now and I could see shapes and forms reflected in the starlight, and the stars themselves encrusting the sky; it was wonderful to see again, for that brief experience of total darkness had given me a little inkling of what it would be like to be blind.



Up we went, hanging on to tree roots, panting up over stones. Bamili Rock—the place of threat, of rumour, of perverted worship, older than the Pyramids, a blood-soaked place if ever there was one—this was it. At the moment it seemed like any other large rock. Why are rocks so often magical? Like the Kaba's, for instance, for all Moslems the essence of divinity. A symbol of eternity and strength—rock of ages, as Christians sing? What ancient gods held their court here? Sweating with exertion, I stood on the flat summit and looked across the surface, bare of vegetation save for an occasional stunted tree growing from a fissure, at a circle of fires which ringed the natural platform.

“Here are our distinguished visitors,” Roland said, without now bothering to conceal his mockery. I looked again, blinking at the fires; the figures around them were like moving bronzes, compounds of light and shade. I saw Clausen at last. He was sitting on the ground cross-legged, elbows on knees and chin on hands, strangely immobile. His face was in shadow and I couldn't see his expression but I think his eyes were closed. Had he fallen already into a kind of trance? Or was he summoning his last reserves of strength through self-enforced repose? The leaf at the centre of the maelstrom—his voice came back to me, his tone, the tilt of his head.

Then I noticed Miss Young. She wasn't with Clausen, she stood a little way off in the semidarkness beyond the fires and it was only a sudden spurt of flame, as someone threw on fresh firewood, that enabled me to catch a glimpse of her. What I saw disturbed me; she looked distraught, her grey wispy hair was ruffled and I thought that she was panting; two men stood close beside her and I felt sure they were holding her arms.

“Why have you brought Miss Young?” I asked sharply. Roland turned his head to look at me and the force of his glance gave me a physical sensation, drying my throat; his

eyes were glinting like black diamonds, his whole face was hard and hating, he was ceasing to pretend to be suave. I wondered whether he had been drinking or, more likely, smoking bhang.

"You will soon see why I have brought Miss Young," he said. "And don't think, Mr. Colquhoun, that you have been left out of our plans."

"You had better not harm her," I said.

Roland laughed. He was gripping the lapel of his jacket in his right hand and I really believe that, quite unconsciously, he was imitating the famous gesture of his hero. This was his hour.

"Your words are empty shells that rattle in a pot." His voice was saturated with contempt. "I have listened long enough to people like you. Now it is my turn."

"You won't get away with it," I said.

He stepped up close to me and I was more than ever sure about the bhang, or some stimulant; his eyes showed a lot of white and he was breathing quickly. I thought he was going to hit me and began to brace myself; without a word being said the two men who were standing behind me seized my arms and jerked me backwards so that I would have fallen if they hadn't held me.

I gave a convulsive twist, but it was no use; Roland laughed again and looked into my face with a concentration of venom that made my blood cold. Had he always hated me like this, all the time when he had been so smooth and outwardly friendly? Yet I knew that the hatred, though personal enough, wasn't for me as an individual but for me as the symbol of a race and an idea. Not that this helped—on the contrary. Hatred for an individual can be influenced, changed, fed or starved; hatred for a symbol is impervious and implacable. For an idea, people send even those they

love to death by torture. I knew that nothing I could say or do was any use.

"This is my country," he said. "You have come creeping in here like a beetle and like a beetle you will die, under my foot."

I said nothing, but stared back at him.

"Do not suppose that I shall let you die quickly," he added. "You have satisfied your wish. You wanted to discover our business here and you shall see that too. You are a lucky man, Mr. Colquhoun."

He was spitting out the words now, he almost seemed to gleam with a concentrated vindictiveness. The men were hurting my arms and making it hard for me not to struggle, but I tried to keep all emotion out of my face. Roland had not finished with me yet.

"You will see something else too. You will see how your great man, your *Doctor* Clausen, your Solomon, your sage, will do as he is told by his humble pupils. You will see that he may not be such a great man after all, at least not so great that a superstitious savage can't bend him like a twig in the hand. There are many others who will see that too and understand its meaning. Yes, you are a lucky man, Mr. Colquhoun."

"Dr. Clausen—" I began, and stopped, annoyed that Roland should have succeeded in provoking me into speech at all. What was the use of going on—of warning him that he couldn't get away with it, that Clausen was too famous and that any mishap to him would let in the world and end the isolation of Bamili Rock? He was quite beyond reason. I fell silent again.

"I am sorry only that you won't be able to carry news of all that you will see to your friends," he added. "But that is impossible. You will get what you want, Mr. Colquhoun,

and you must pay for it. That's fair, isn't it? I am always a fair man."

Again he laughed, a most unpleasant sound—the bhang, if bhang it was, seemed to be increasing its effect—and turned away and left me in the grip of the two men whose acrid, musky odour half-stifled me. After Roland's departure they relaxed their hold a little but it was plain enough that they were not going to let me go and that there was nothing I could do about it. All I could do, which of course I did do, was to curse myself over and over again for a blundering, boneheaded, mule-hearted imbecile, and to cling to the only stream of comfort I could find—that they hadn't yet taken the pistol Gemma had given me.

## 5

I can't attempt to chronicle precisely the ghastly and confused events of the next few hours. African ceremonies, from what I've seen of them, appear always to be shapeless and unorganized, but underneath the lax and time-ignoring surface is a framework of competent management. Gradually, a pattern began to emerge. The drums began again and gathered strength until they seemed like the beat of a living heart a thousand times magnified; the fires grew brighter and cast long shadows which danced upon the rock. Then at last I saw Vuko: a tall, imperious man with bony face and greying hair standing near the rock's edge, whose shadow fell with an effect satanic and grotesque on the spectators below. A long robe of fur (I think monkey-skin), caught up on one shoulder, magnified his natural dignity; copper bangles glistened on his long, slender arms; in his hair he wore a single scarlet feather taken from the wing of a turaco.

He raised his arms and the drums stopped suddenly, as they had before. The hush that followed was like the bursting of a dam which released a great flood of silence to flow

over our heads, over the rock, into the trees, up even to the stars. Night, darkness, mystery immersed us; only the flames were free. Then Vuko spoke. He spoke gently, yet every word was plain. His voice was deep and resonant and musical. He spoke perhaps for fifteen minutes, and when he ceased a murmur went up from the crowd like the sound of a distant waterfall. My eyes were on Clausen; I could see him only intermittently, as people moved about between us; he had lifted his head, the firelight glistened on his pale, tight-drawn skin, he was gazing at Vuko as if his head was fixed in that position forever.

When I looked back at Vuko, Roland stood beside him and started to speak. His voice was higher-pitched, less controlled and penetrating, more voluble and therefore less impressive if one didn't understand the words, but it rang with fervour and sincerity. He delivered a long speech. I shall never know what he said, but it was clearly something that inflamed the blood of his listeners. I felt my own captors stir, shift from foot to foot, grip my arms tighter and edge imperceptibly towards the centre of the rock. Occasionally they made little grunting noises in their throats. When Roland paused, there was a louder murmur which this time had the sense of anger—I was going to say hunger. I was irresistibly reminded of a wild beast down there in the darkness, a wild beast savage and unfed that detects in its nostrils the first smell of blood. As the night went on, this illusion that a huge, hungry beast crouched just below the rock became stronger and stronger until I could almost smell its rancid breath; sometimes it growled, sometimes it groaned, sometimes it snuffled; it was always there, alert, malign, and waiting.

Roland stepped back into the shadows, Vuko raised his arms as if in supplication and a long wailing chant came from his mouth—at least I suppose it did, the sound filled the

whole air, it might have come out of the bowels of the rock, from the sky, anywhere. It ran like searing poison right through my bones, down my spine, into my skull. I felt stone-cold and fixed my eyes on the nearest fire, which glowed in front of me like a gigantic ruby and seemed to burn right into my brain. When I looked again towards Vuko I saw that the horrors had begun. They started with a ram, a white ram whose agony could be plainly seen against the dark rock. What followed was very nasty and seemed indefinitely prolonged. Sometimes I shut my eyes, but curiously enough this required a great effort, my vision was drawn back again and again to the group with Vuko in the centre; an impulse stronger than my own repugnance was compelling me, inviting me, to relish what I loathed.

Once I did succeed in keeping my eyelids squeezed down for several minutes, although behind them I still could see the glowing of the fires. A scuffling sound recalled me and a sensation of horror more frightful than any I have experienced before or since flooded over me. They were dragging a figure I knew well across the rock to fling it down in front of Vuko. A shriek of total fear raised every goose-pimple on my skin—a sound not human but animal; it ended with a sort of gurgle as a hand was thrust over her face. Miss Young lay at Vuko's feet, convulsively kicking and securely held.

Instinctively I tried to wrench my arms free, but my guards tightened their grip and jerked me backwards; a half-gurgle, half-shriek was repeated; the wild beast below the rock growled and then the drums began again, very softly, an obbligato to Vuko's chanting, to the crowd's murmurs, the spitting of fires. I let my arms go limp, hoping dimly to lull the guards into a moment of inattention; I could still feel the pistol hard against my thigh. My head was swimming, and I found my eyes turned by some new compulsion towards the fire; the orange-red glow swelled and then shrank

again, swelled and shrank, with a pulsating motion in tune with the rhythm of the drums. This held me spellbound. I knew that if I watched it any longer I should fall myself into that fatal trance which was the secret of Vuko's power, I should become the creature of his will; yet I couldn't pull my eyes away from that bright focus. My pulses and the drums were intermixed, I seemed at one with the night, with the drums, with the fires and with the wild beast that had now fallen silent but crouched hungrily below the rock.

With a terrific effort of will I shut my eyes and held them shut while I counted twenty; then I tilted my head and opened them to the sky. There were the stars, too many and too distant to twinkle at me; a dusting of light, and for the moment the throbbing fire had lost its grip. I looked back at the rock. Vuko was standing with his arms raised, like an executioner; the huddled figure now lay quiet at his feet; and Ewart Clausen was bending over her and, as I watched, the bare flesh parted silently before his long-bladed knife.

Did everyone in that assembly see an orange fire expanding and contracting like a pulsating heart, filling his sight? The rhythm of the drums was soft, subdued, insinuating, exactly in tune with the quickened pulse in my head. I think that Vuko held them all in his power, but that this time he had no need to project into their minds an imaginary vision; this time what they thought they saw was taking place. This time the eye, and the mind's eye, coincided.

I cannot, even now, think of all that I saw on the rock. I saw Clausen's face, his blind, staring, frozen face, as for a moment he looked up at the wet knife in his hand: a face stiff with a kind of exaltation, at the point of the circle where depravity and rapture join. My arms were hanging limply and my guards' grip had slackened; they were breathing heavily; they were in the full grip of the spell I had managed

to evade and I realized, with a prick of hope, that, of all this gathering, I alone, perhaps—or I and Roland—was in full command of my senses. With a bound I sprang forward and wrenched my arms free, and then I drew the pistol and fired wildly at the group by the fire. My two shots reverberated around the rocks like a crack of thunder and, as they died, a scream pierced the air. Instantly the drums stopped; in that fraction of a second of dead silence I turned and bounded for the encircling darkness that had been my jailer and was now my only friend.

It was all so instantaneous, and the hypnotic trance into which Vuko had plunged the whole company so opaque, that for a few moments—I don't know how long—everyone was paralyzed. By the time they stirred, I was gone. I sprinted a few paces down the path and then dived into the undergrowth. In the fraction of a second just before I plunged, I looked back over my shoulder and saw the tableau coming to life. I carry with me still the image of the fires, the shadowy rock, figures stirring as if brought to life from the dead: and the glint of firelight on a knife, and the knife falling in a great parabola, with the hand that held it, over the rock's lip; and a crash, and a great shout as if torn from the belly of the wild beast. And then my own frantic, breathless plunge through the bush.

I remember little of the next stretch of time. I remember fighting, as a drowning man must fight the waves, through a wall of stinging hostile branches and spikes and creepers, through things that jabbed at my face and arms and clung to my feet and wrapped themselves around my waist and legs. I hit out with everything, flayed with arms and kicked with legs, and the bush hit back and held me like Abraham's ram; I put my head down and tunnelled through like a piston-rod. It seemed to me that I was stuck forever, simply impaled, but I suppose that I was moving pretty quickly, with the bay-



ing of the hungry beast and the roaring of blood in my ears.

I think I was incredibly lucky, and blundered very quickly into another game-path like Tépé's; at any rate I found the bush giving way more easily and my feet less encumbered. My self-control came back and I slowed down and even managed to bring myself to a halt. And now I found that all the shouting and commotion had stopped; there was a dead silence; I could hear only the pounding of my heart and the pumping of my lungs.

This was much worse than sounds of pursuit. It meant that Roland and Vuko had immediately reestablished control over the assembly, that the people were already disciplined and that the search would be organized. My chances against a pack of hunters who knew this piece of forest well were almost nil. My best hope was to lie low until morning and then, if they hadn't found me, try to work my way down to the forest's edge.

But they *would* have found me, I thought. They knew my direction, they knew the lie of the land; it would be a simple matter to encircle me, then to tighten and finally close the net. That, no doubt, was what they had already begun to arrange.

I started now to move with caution, instead of in a blind rush, pausing to listen every few steps. Every whispering twig or falling leaf sent cold shivers down me; crouching figures with long knives pursued me silently along the game-path and lay in wait at every bend; malignant hands were stretched out to strangle me from behind every tree.

The path led downwards to a little stream whose ripple I mistook at first for the whispering of my pursuers; I squatted motionless for what seemed like hours before I realized the truth. Thankfully, greedily, I drank some of its cold, sweet water. This steadied me. I realized that in the darkness, in a forest half the size of England with a visibility of about one

yard, or no yards—audibility was what mattered—even my pursuers might find it hard to net their prey. It occurred to me also that the stream probably flowed into the Lua-la river, and that if I could follow it down it would lead me to the edge of the forest at some spot not very far from Clausen's camp. And at Clausen's camp, Gemma would be waiting in the car, unless—but that didn't bear thinking about. Gemma was there, and I was here, not above perhaps five miles away. Somehow or other I had got to reach her. And somehow or other, I would.

## 6

The stream was my lifeline. Its water was less than knee-deep in most places, though now and again it formed a little pool; I blundered into the first of these almost up to my armpits and soaked the pistol; I wondered whether it would mind. Pistols, I thought, were probably waterproof, but I couldn't test the theory, so this was an added anxiety. The rocks were slippery, the water very cold, but even so it was easier going than the forest, which in fact was impossible once the game-path had petered out. I just couldn't have forced a way through. So to hit the game-path, and then the stream, was a great piece of luck and gave me my chance, and I couldn't resist the feeling that some kind of providence or destiny had guided me—egotistical, of course, but it gave me confidence.

Once I paused to rest beside a big rock, just above the stream, which had a little cave under it. Only a small cave, and a smelly one, but big enough to hide in, and I wondered whether I wouldn't be wiser to stay there until daylight. I gave myself a few minutes' rest under the rock and ate my sandwiches—sodden by now, but I was hungry enough to gobble them in spite of that; it seemed an age since I'd put them in my pocket. I couldn't help thinking about Clau-

sen and wondering whether, in those few seconds that followed the shattering of the trance, he had answered the question that had so tormented him. He had acted swiftly; he had known what to do. I hoped that the end of his uncertainty and the need for action, tragic as they were, had brought him some kind of cold comfort in his last moment. To know is better than to dread, even if the knowledge is bitter; to act better than to hesitate, even if the action ends all. He had escaped his tormentors, his plunge was into freedom and perhaps, in that last split-second, he was able to accept it with joy. And Arabella Young? It was better not to think of things like that, and my energies were bent now on my own plight.

I continued downstream with the fixed idea that so long as I stuck to it I couldn't lose my direction. Curious, to think that if one kept on long enough one would reach the great cities of the Congo, civilization, eventually the sea.

When I had halted for a moment to listen to the water ahead—I was proceeding more by sound than by sight, having discovered that I could "hear" a pool, or rapids, or a turn in the stream's course—a new sound disturbed me. At first I thought it was a bird. The noise was raucous, a kind of cackle—hornbill, turaco, parrot? The forest is full of strange birds which screech rather than sing. Certainly I must be disturbing them, and a cry of protest or warning likely. All the same, I wondered. I'd heard no movement; would a bird sit still and call in the night? Another answered distantly from the darkness on my left. I stood stock-still and listened, my skin prickling. Some instinct was warning me; but was it a false warning? There was a long silence. Then I heard the call again and it had come nearer. Without another thought I turned and picked my way back over the slippery rocks towards the little cave. I had an instinct to go to ground, like an animal.

I reached the rock, clambered up and wormed my way into the little cave underneath it. A shallow entrance gave way to a cavity plenty large enough for me to sit upright. A stench of rotting meat suddenly stung my throat and nose and contracted my stomach. There was something dead in the cave: an animal, I supposed, that had crawled in to die. Well, I had crawled in to live, and would have to put up with it.

I sat still listening and trying to breathe as lightly as possible to avoid nausea. And then I heard a sound—not a bird this time, not from the stream or forest but from *inside* the cave. The sound of something moving gently in the utter blackness a foot or two away.

I don't think I did quite stifle a scream, and no power on earth could have stopped me from squirming like a demented lizard out of the cave. I think my first thought was of spooks and monsters, those ogres who, from Cyclops onwards, have been the natural denizens of caves. Almost simultaneously, a more rational flash of thought suggested that a cave beside a river in a forest was the ideal—the inevitable—situation for a leopard's lair. My feet must have almost literally been in the creature's mouth. Why hadn't it torn me to bits? Perhaps it was as amazed as I.

With a terrific effort, I brought myself to a halt just outside the cave. If my instinct had been right, one of my human pursuers was moving up the stream within fifty yards or so. And behind me perhaps a leopard crouching with its muscles taut to spring.

I can't in the least recall what I thought or did, save that I clung with both hands to some tree roots and pressed my back with all my strength against the wall of the cave. Somehow or other my brain had made a choice—the beast rather than the man. I think now this was the right decision, even if the beast *had* sprung. It would have finished me off

quickly and its motives were the same as mine, self-preservation. I even felt, in the midst of panic, a flash of sympathy. As for the human motives, they were bestial; and the beast's were innocent.

The leopard didn't spring. Later, I decided that that cave must have harboured a family of cubs and that the mother had been out hunting for their supper. Had an adult leopard been present, it would certainly have sprung.

I could hear the stream gurgling quietly beneath me, and the plop of a leaf landing in the water, and the tiny splash of some water rat or vole. Then I detected a sort of rustle, a splash, the undefinable sound of movement, cautious movement in the darkness, of some body or thing. But whether an animal body, or a human one, there was no knowing. Only the faintest stirrings came to my ears. Then they died down and I heard nothing but, again, those soft twitchings from behind me in the recess of the cave.

A long, long silence followed in which the drumming of the blood in the ears interfered with my listening powers until I tried deep breathing; this did calm me down. After what seemed like an hour I began to worm my way down the bank towards the stream. In my own ears it sounded as if I was scraping a heavy object across an echoing floor. The bird's call sounded again—and this time it was behind me, upstream. Then came an unmistakable splash, too loud to be the work of a water rat. It must have been a dislodged stone falling into the stream. I had no doubts now. A man had gone past me in the darkness, walking upstream. Another man was moving through the forest above me. Part of a patrol. If I was right, I'd gone through the cordon, or rather it had gone by me.

I slipped down again into the stream and went on. It was painfully slow work. I wanted to run, to abandon caution, but held myself back. There would be other patrols, per-

haps an outer cordon, listeners everywhere with keener ears than I. After a while it seemed as if I'd been doing nothing else all my life but slip and clamber, hang on to roots, squelch through mud trying to avoid splashing, scratch myself on overhanging branches, bark my wretched shins on jagged bits of rock. But I kept going, and a time came when I began to sense that the trees were thinning out; a filtering amount of light crept in; once more I caught sight of the stars.

Suddenly, I emerged. The margin was surprisingly abrupt; at one moment, darkness and opacity; at the next, starlight and sky. It was wonderful to stand in the open again. I felt safer, more by instinct than by reason, for Roland's writ ran here as much as on Bamili Rock and I was more exposed; my danger might even be greater. But I felt at last that I had allies in the stars, in the power of sight and above all, in the fact that somewhere close at hand Gemma would be waiting with the car. Unless there'd been a disaster too bad to think about.

## 7

And so I left my faithful stream—it felt like abandoning an old friend—and struck off along the edge of the forest in the direction in which I hoped Clausen's camp lay. It was now about three o'clock. My journey through the forest had occupied nearly four hours. What a lifetime can pass in half a night! Many times I'd thought: if I escape, I'll never complain about anything again; merely to be alive and unhunted is enough.

I was dog-tired by now, my feet leaden, I had to push myself along, and all the time I had the curious feeling that I was being, as it were, propelled, or led, in a certain direction. It was a feeling that could very soon have been converted into a conviction that I was under some supernatural

guidance, watched over by a guardian angel, perhaps: an illusion sprung of extreme weariness, when the mind is open to all sorts of queer, half-formed notions. At any rate I plodded on; struck a path (the bush was honeycombed with little winding paths and dotted here and there with bits of cultivation) which led me at first in the proper direction and then too far right-handed; struck out again to the left, hit another path, and so on, plodding mechanically by now, hungry, wet, cold, bruised, aching, generally a wreck. But alive.

All of a sudden I saw a roof, a house of substance, a dark stain of creeper half-obscuring it. I approached step by step like a nervous beast; found myself on a lawn; and realized with a shock that I'd blundered into enemy headquarters. I was back in Clausen's camp.

I walked slowly backwards into the shelter of a tree and waited. Nothing happened. Was everyone either sleeping, or out in the forest searching for me? At any rate, I knew now not only where I was, but how to find Gemma. The path to the forest ran from the camp's western perimeter and Gemma would be there. It was queer to see that low, whitewashed building with its bougainvillea creeper (black now in the starlight) where Clausen had lived and dreamed, created and suffered, and to think that, its heart now stilled, it had shrunk back to the hollow status of a hut in the bush, soon to be filmed in dust and cobwebs and gradually demolished by termites tunnelling in the walls.

The building gleamed whitely in the starlight like a blossom in the dark, and as I skirted it I thought I detected a movement in the veranda's shadow. I stood stock-still. And then I saw that I'd been right. Something *was* moving, a black shape; as I watched, it emerged from the cavern of the veranda and moved along the front, half in starlight, half in shadow. I couldn't make out whether it was a hunched man or a largish animal; it moved quickly and furtively; then

it disappeared around the angle of the building and I watched for its return. A long silence. And then a throaty, gurgling sound which gathered strength and rose to an infernal cackle, a dreadful inhuman penetrating sound, unbelievably eerie in this half-light with its menacing shadows.

Without more ado, I ran. I'd had as much as I could stand. I blundered through the bush for perhaps a hundred yards and emerged on the path to the forest, to the car, perhaps to safety. And as I slowed down, the realization came to me of what I'd seen. The idiot! Guarding Clausen's house, waiting for Clausen's return—somehow attached, in his poor clouded brain, to Clausen, tied to him by some queer umbilical cord of the mind; trying perhaps to guard Clausen from the evils which his instinct told him threatened the man he regarded as his protector. The poor idiot, abandoned, unconsidered, a pathetic Caliban. By fate's irony, whatever happened to the rest of us, the idiot would be safe, protected by superstition from the fate of the sane.

I was nearly at the end of my tether, and when I reached the junction of the path with the forest and saw that there was no car, no Gemma, nobody at all, I sat down in the grass and pretty well packed it in. The worst of it was that I knew something must have happened to Gemma. My God, I thought, what a monumental, witless imbecile I'd been; as if a man of Roland's forethought would have overlooked the whole question of Gemma—as if he'd have left Gemma to her own devices, knowing what he knew of our relationship. A thousand horrible images came into my mind. I sat there not caring any longer what was to become of me.

I sat so lost in misery and defeat that I didn't even react to the sound of approaching footsteps. I didn't even try to conceal myself. I took the pistol from my pocket, it's true, hoping it was still in working order; it was a question of falling into the hands of God, not into the hands of Spain.



I slipped back the safety catch and simply sat and waited.

The steps came on and a figure stood beside me; he wore a hat, which seemed unnecessary. He didn't notice me until he was at my side. Then he uttered a soft exclamation and put out a hand; it touched me on the shoulder and I started back. Yet as I did so I realized that the figure wasn't that of an enemy. As the man moved I saw that he wore spectacles. At the same moment he must have caught sight of the gun.

"A friend," he said quickly, in English. "Please do not shoot."

It was Xenophon.

I could have cried on his shoulder. All I could say was, "Where is she? Is she safe?"

Xenophon put a soothing hand on my arm. "Yes, safe," he said. "She waits for you."

"Where?"

He pointed to the bush. "We wait by the road, so we can go quick. We hide the car."

Relief was like a hot wave that almost bowled me over. "And she's all right?"

"She fears for you. This is a bad place; follow me."

He stepped into the bush and I followed him as he had invited, enjoying the tremendous luxury of shedding the responsibility of deciding what to do. Gemma had sent him to wait for me beside the path and lead me to the car; she'd had the sense to stay concealed. And Xenophon to keep his head.

8

The old hired Citroën was well hidden, just off the track; Gemma was there and real and safe. Despair gave way to a great surge of hope and confidence; we were going to get out of this, we were going to live, we were together and that was all I cared about.

"I'd given up hoping—almost," she said. "Not quite, though." She had been crying, I could feel the dryness of her cheeks. Now she laughed and added, "Your face! What have you done to it?"

I rubbed a hand over it, uncomprehending; it seemed all in one piece.

"Commando stuff," she said. Then I remembered that I'd blacked it with charcoal, about a hundred years ago.

"Monsieur," said Xenophon, "we must go; it is dangerous; they search for you."

"Where's Roland?" I asked.

"I do not know. Many people have returned from the forest, I heard them pass, but I was hidden, I could not see."

"Where's his car?"

"His car is at the camp. Monsieur. . . . Le Docteur? . . . He comes too?"

"I'm afraid not, Xenophon," I said. "He won't come back from the forest."

"You mean tonight?"

"Tonight or ever."

Xenophon was silent for a moment. Then, surprisingly, he muttered, "Requiescat in pace," and crossed himself. He was a devout Christian, as I later discovered, and a fine man.

"Let's go," Gemma said. Elizabeth was in the car; Gemma added, "I couldn't leave her behind, she was in a panic." I wondered vaguely what had happened to James.

The headlights were so bold and naked, when Gemma turned them on, I shrank back as if hit in the face. They proclaimed our position to the world, and the engine roared in my ears like a jet bomber.

"They'll see us," I protested.

"We've got a start," Gemma answered. She was twisting the wheel to and fro, our track was rough and rudimentary, we bumped along too fast for the springs.

I asked, "What's the plan?"

"We'd better make at top speed for Stanleyville and get in first with our story. That'll spike Roland's guns."

"I'm not so sure." Hitherto I'd been too much bent on escape and on survival to think of the next step. Now the fact came home to me that I didn't really know how Clausen had died. I had fired two shots, after all, which might well have hit him. If this was so—and I couldn't be certain—hadn't I played straight into Roland's hands? If he'd failed to catch me in the forest, couldn't he catch me in the trap of the law?

With thoughts still confused, I explained as much as I could to Gemma, who simply said, "Of course there was nothing else you could do."

"The French authorities mightn't think so. Not if Roland's ready, as he will be, with his version of the affair."

"He was the murderer, not you. He and Vuko."

"It'll be my word against Roland's. And suppose he has a body with a bullet in it to produce in evidence? A bullet from my gun?"

"Rivière knows the truth of the business."

"Rivière's a junior district officer known to be a bit hysterical. Roland's the good African, the blue-eyed boy. If he can't get me in one way, he'll try another. A slower way, but it might prove more reliable."

"Then what can we do?"

I hesitated. I'd thought of a plan, if you could call it that—a chance, anyway; but it wasn't much of a chance and it would involve Gemma.

"We'd better go on," I said.

"And see you end up in the dock on a murder charge? After waiting half a lifetime in the pitch darkness tormented by those revolting drums? We'd better think of something more intelligent."

"Intelligence has hardly been our long suit," I suggested.

Gemma asked, "What about the other road? The one you came along from Juba?"

"It isn't really a road. And we haven't enough petrol, either."

"I've put in four extra tins."

"You think of everything," I said.

"Then that's settled. Wouldn't the French need an extradition order to get you out of the Sudan?"

"I suppose they would. And then I might get into Ethiopia, if I could get hold of some cash."

"We might," Gemma said.

"If we get safely to Juba you can go back to Kenya, or down to Khartoum."

Of course, it was a crazy plan and before we reached Lu-la I'd realized it was crazy and told Gemma that she must stay with Chris and telegraph at once to Stanleyville to fetch the authorities. Clausen's disappearance would set the whole of the A.E.F. on end and half the police in central Africa would turn up next day. I thought that Gemma would be safe with Chris until the French authorities took over.

Gemma made no comment until I'd finished and then she simply said, "Don't be an idiot, Andrew. I'm coming with you, at least as far as Juba. Then we'll see." I protested, but without, I suppose, enough conviction to win the argument. By now I think I was rather lightheaded. I did suggest that we leave behind Elizabeth and Xenophon. Elizabeth, who hitherto had kept silent in the back, intervened. "Now you return Nairobi, I go with you."

"But four people—"

"James will kill me," she said flatly.

"Where is James?"

"He went yesterday with Dr. Roland, but he will come back. Perhaps he is in Lu-la already."

"She'd better come," Gemma decided. So she did.

Luala's little bungalows and huts lay fast asleep, not a chink of light showing. We just avoided a thin, mangy dog who ran across in front of our wheels. Our track joined the main road, so-called: right for Stanleyville and civilization, left for the broken border country of the Sudan and the valley of the Nile. We turned left.

"Can our lights be seen from the camp?" I asked Xenophon.

"I think they can."

I thought of Roland's powerful Buick. The old Citroën was doing well, but it was full of rattles and at least ten years old. Poor Chris—he'd be the loser; I should have to pay him for it one day.

"It's the wrong way around," Gemma said.

"What is?"

"Our running away from Roland and Vuko. We ought to be running after them."

"That's life for you," I remarked, and we drove on.

9

I looked back towards Luala. No sign yet of pursuit. Perhaps Roland wouldn't follow. Perhaps he'd go to Stanleyville and tell his story and brand me as a murderer, and then nothing I said afterwards would be believed. A gamble: I knew a lot, and I had told Gemma much of it and, if I did no more, I could arouse enough doubt to make Roland's position untenable. Xenophon, even Elizabeth, could make things very awkward for him. If you came to think of it, this carload contained the four people in the world who had most evidence against Roland. With us out of the way, everything would be plain sailing. Clausen, with his well-known interest in anthropology, had been invited to witness an innocent native ceremony; I had burst in on the scene and shot him—shot Arabella Young too, probably, everyone

could witness to the firing of two shots. Clausen would have a slap-up funeral with flowers from everyone from the president of the Republic downwards and the hunt would be up for Colquhoun, the dangerous homicidal maniac. Yes, it was pretty clear that Roland couldn't afford to let me escape.

Ahead, the sky was making preparations for the dawn. That is to say, the deep midnight purple was paling just a little to a finer blue and the stars were fading. Soon the whiteness that precedes the start of sunrise would show just over the horizon and the stars would go out altogether in that part of the sky. The subtle changes, the infinite gradations in the quality of light; the thinning of the air, the slow retreat of darkness, the promise of a sublime rebirth beyond the horizon; these are things that never fail to astonish me. Even the greatest poet is impotent before these simple, daily happenings. Blankets, scarves, mantles—nothing describes the night, even the image of Phoebus and his chariot does less than justice to the sunrise. I can only say that never had I seen a dawn like this, and never shall again. As Dr. Johnson observed, it sharpens a man's wits wonderfully when he knows he is about to be hanged; and it sharpens his senses to as fine a point when he has just, and only just, escaped something worse than hanging.

Now we had left behind the forest and bumped along through fairly high bush, the clear illimitable sky above us and the smell of grass and open country all about. It was dark still. Several nightjars got up in front of us, launching themselves like soft feathered rockets into the air. I often wonder how nightjars manage to avoid destruction; they leave their escape until the sixtieth second of the eleventh hour.

"Anything in sight?" Gemma asked.

"Not yet, Sister Anne."

The dawn began in earnest; surprisingly quickly the stars

went out, leaving only the strongest piercing with determined luminosity a sky now the colour of dark delphiniums; and a saffron yellow tinge spread over the east. The limpid air had lightened and felt cold and fresh as new milk; one gulped it eagerly into the lungs. A rainbird's notes fell like drops of honey from the cobweb-spangled bush and a file of blue-crested, plump, speckled guinea fowl ran in a state of agitation across the track ahead. Light soaked into the sky like some great effulgent wave breaking over the shores of the universe. At any minute the great, the tremendous entry would be made: the master of every fly and bird and leaf blade, all now alerted for his coming, would appear. A duiker with its small ears pricked and one foot raised stood immobile by the trackside, its shell-like nostrils lifted to the singing air. I heard an exclamation behind me.

"The lights come," said Xenophon.

Behind lay darkness pricked now by a moving bulb of brightness that twinkled at us through the bush like a malevolent eye. We had just crossed a little valley and were topping the opposite ridge. The car's headlamps came into sight on the far side, not more than a mile away.

"He's not lost much time," Gemma said. Her voice was quiet, but not quite steady; I think she'd hoped, as I'd scarcely dared to, that Roland would let us go.

"What are we to do?" she asked.

"Did you put in any beer?"

"Beer! Do you suggest we draw up and invite him to stop and join us in one for the road?"

"Invite him to stop, anyway. Elizabeth, you must change places with me."

"He will kill us," Elizabeth said.

Gemma asked, "Shall I pull up?"

"No, go as fast as you can."

Our change-over in the bouncing old car was scarcely

graceful, and for my part it was very painful. I was sore and stiff. When we'd managed it I found six beer bottles under the back window. It seemed a dreadful waste, but I broke four of them against the door, and the liquid slopped around my feet and Xenophon's.

"He'll know that trick," Gemma said.

"He may, but it's the only chance I can see. And even if he knows it, glass is hard to dodge."

The road was winding now among some thickish bush creased by many of these little gullies. As soon as we reached the next one, we slowed almost to walking pace. Xenophon leant out on one side and I on the other and we chucked our bits of broken bottle on to the track, which just there twisted helpfully, so that his headlights wouldn't pick out the broken glass until he was right on top of it; and I hoped he'd be going too fast to brake in time.

His lights were not far behind us now. They came up over the opposite ridge just as we regained momentum. He'd shortened the distance already to about a quarter of a mile. Gemma put her foot on the accelerator and the old car jolted forward at its top speed.

"Suppose that works," Gemma said, "what happens next? He'll change the wheel and come on."

"Not if two tires are written off, or three—even four with luck."

"He'll mend them. That might take two hours. He'd still catch up before Juba."

"We'll have to think a move ahead. We might do a wounded buffalo. You know—leave the track, let him go by and circle back to it later."

"I suppose so," Gemma said without much conviction and switched off the headlamps. Dawn had come and it was suddenly chilly. Doves were gurgling throatily in the branches, the shapes of trees and bushes were sharp, the air was thin



and translucent. We climbed a long, slow rise and from the crest we could see an empty track behind us.

"It's worked!" Gemma said exultantly. "Even if it did make the Citroën smell like a third-rate bar."

It must have worked. How many tires? I wondered. Perhaps the lot? Could the inner tubes have been so badly gashed as to be unmendable? A simple ruse, but the old tricks are often the best.

## 10

We sped on with rising spirits towards the rising sun. The whole east had now gone orange, primrose and salmon pink, with a few little violet clouds floating lightly on this ocean of iridescent splendour. Then appeared the sun's corona, blinding, triumphant, thrusting over the edge of the plain. A sense of expectancy (as when a great orchestra, poised and ready, waits for the first downward stroke of the conductor's baton) held the whole earth tense and alert.

And then it came, the great gold molten sun, the eye of day; it seemed fairly to leap above the horizon. In a moment, all was changed; an aureate light enveloped us; long, sharp shadows leapt to life, cobwebs like spun mother-of-pearl shimmered on every thornspike, the glory and freshness of the morning filled the air. The whole earth seemed about to burst into song. I was thankful to see such a sunrise again.

"Any sign?" asked Gemma.

I looked around; Xenophon beside me was sitting with his neck permanently craned.

"Not yet."

"How soon ought we to leave this track?"

"We ought to make all the time we can first. If we could cross into the Sudan . . ."

"Yes, but there's no boundary mark. And if he sees us first, we're sunk."

"Let's risk one more hour, then deviate at the first likely spot."

"All right," Gemma said. "You time it. I'm hungry; you must be too. There's food in a box."

She had indeed thought of everything: sandwiches, and two unbelievably welcome flasks of tea, which we shared out in little sips, so as not to waste any. The Citroën bounced like a rubber ball and made my bruises ache worse than ever; my eyes felt full of grit from sleeplessness and I envied Elizabeth, who had dozed off, jolts or no jolts, in the front. Her head hung like a limp flower on its stalk and flopped from side to side with the motion of the car, sometimes knocking against the doorframe without waking her. Gemma was having a hard time twisting the wheel about, trying to avoid the worst holes and boulders. I began to be seriously afraid that the poor old Citroën would disintegrate. There'd been some rain, too. We came to several squelchy places and nearly stuck in one of them. I asked whether we had chains with us; Gemma thought not. In any case, we daren't stop to put them on.

Now it was light, I could take stock of our possessions and saw that Gemma had put in a rifle, one of SMAC's no doubt, and some ammunition. If we did stick or break down, we should have a chance, anyway. That is, if Xenophon and I hadn't broken our necks first on the roof which we kept hitting every time the car bounced.

"How far is Juba?" Gemma asked, after a particularly bad bump which led to some ominous noises from the back axle.

"I should think about four hundred miles."

"A longish walk."

"God will help us," Xenophon said unexpectedly. "We are like chickens under His wing."

I wished I could share his confidence. The state of the road was worrying me. It was getting wetter, although in theory we had reached drier country. But in the flatter, lower-lying region ahead we must expect to run into patches of black-cotton soil. Even a little rain can make this curious kind of clay as spongy and treacherous as a bog, and cars can stick in it like wasps in honey.

The bush was thinning out now, though there was still plenty of it—more thorny and not so tall. We were leaving the tsetse bush behind us and approaching the country of the cattlemen. The sun blazed now in full unmitigated glory from a pale sky and we were getting hot and clammy. Shadows lay across the grass with a sharp clarity which they would lose when the air began to quiver with heat; as yet it was as pellucid as mountain water, and many birds sang. A pair of banded hoopoes flew drunkenly across the road just ahead of us, absurd with their cockatoo crests: a sign that we were reaching hotter, lower country, away from forests and hills.

Xenophon and I took it in turns to keep watch through the back window. The snag was that you couldn't see far through the bush and I feared that Roland's car might be upon us now at any time.

"We'd better think about pulling off the track," I suggested.

"What about our tire marks?" Gemma asked.

This rain had upset our calculations. The spoor of our tires showed up plainly on the freshly moistened earth and it wouldn't take Roland long to realize that we had pulled off the road. But he'd waste time coming back to look for our tire marks and if we found a dry, stony sort of place he might miss them altogether.

Now, of course, those dry, stony patches, of which there'd been plenty so far, disappeared, and the twin wheel-tracks

which constituted our "road" ran over moist earth that took the imprint of our tires plainly.

"I think he will be close behind us now," Xenophon said; he had been watching the sun; the heat was now strong on the arm with which I was gripping the doorframe to hold myself steady.

"Perhaps the top of this next gully will do."

We crossed at intervals the little streamlets, dry no longer, which meandered from the watershed behind us to the plain below. Umbrella thorns rose above a light covering of bush, and here and there the first of the euphorbias indicated that we were approaching a low-rainfall belt.

We crossed the stream, leaving clear tire marks, and slowed down at the top of the incline. What we needed was an outcrop of sheer rock. No such luck: but there was a bit of shale here, and tufty grasses, and no actual mud. With a quick twist of the wheel Gemma swung the car off the track almost at right angles and we thudded and banged over some rocks, by sheer luck avoiding damage to the crankcase. On we jolted, very slowly, in bottom gear, dodging among the bush and roots and trees and anthills in a crazy progress at about ten miles an hour.

"She won't stand much of this," Gemma said. "It's only a matter of moments before something goes."

The radiator water was boiling, too. And we crunched beneath our wheels long, spiky thorns quite tough enough to pierce our thin tires.

"We must stop and fill up with water," Gemma said.

The notion of leaving the track to allow Roland to pass us no longer seemed to possess many merits. He'd notice the absence of our tracks at the next watercourse, if not before; we couldn't travel far through this bush; and we were in the dark as to the enemy's movements.

We talked it over, and decided that the most important

thing was to know whether Roland's car was still after us. Xenophon walked back to the track, about a mile, to hide and watch. If Roland passed, he was to come and tell us. I said I would relieve him in three hours. We found a shady place for the car under an umbrella thorn and settled down to wait. At last I had a few moments alone with Gemma. There was no need to say much, we understood each other's feelings and I didn't even reproach myself for having brought her here, with all its dangers, instead of to the safety of Stanleyville; in a curious way she was enjoying the risk and the battle of wits, even though its outcome looked bleak.

If we had discussed it, we'd have been forced to admit that the chances against our reaching Juba, or anywhere else, were about a hundred to one. So we didn't discuss it. Gemma washed one or two of my gashes with radiator water and applied adhesive tape; then Elizabeth returned from the little walk in the bush she had taken and I made myself as comfortable as I could and went fast asleep.

## 11

I was awakened by someone shaking me; it was Xenophon; he was panting, and said that Roland's car had gone past. It was by now about eleven. There were three men in the Buick, he said: Roland, James and a driver. They were travelling fast.

"The faster the better," Gemma remarked. "Then they won't spot our dodge so soon."

Our plan was to make the best pace we could through the bush on a course parallel to the road for half an hour or so and then to swing back towards the road. We'd then scout ahead to see whether Roland's Buick had gone by. If it had, we'd wait in hiding until it returned, then nip back into the road and continue at top speed towards Juba. If we found that Roland had turned back before we rejoined the road we

would, of course, continue all out towards Juba. All we could expect to gain by this activity was time—we didn't hope to shake him off completely—but time was the important thing.

Our weak point, of course, was the Citroën's decrepitude. Everything rattled and banged and the springs couldn't stand up much longer to the treatment they were getting, even if we didn't drop into one of the large concealed holes made by wild pig or by ant bears, or bash the axle against a rock, or seize the engine up from overheating. There was also an ancillary risk from the fauna. This was typical rhino country, and rhinos are shortsighted, bad-tempered animals. If we disturbed a testy old gentleman he'd very likely charge, and the impact of two or more tons of pachyderm would altogether change the shape of the Citroën.

So all in all, I thought, we should be pretty lucky if we reached the track again, let alone elude Roland. But we had a rifle. So, of course, had Roland; it would be entirely a question of who got in first. Gemma drove, and I knelt on the back seat with the rifle in my hands and my eyes on the bush behind us. Our lives did now literally depend on my eyesight. I'm not very good about the midday glare in hot countries, and this was where my dark glasses came in. It really was odd that I should have slipped them into my pocket just before I started off from Rivière's bungalow. It gave me confidence.

I watched the bush behind us with the concentration of a thirst-parched sailor in a lost lifeboat searching the horizon for a ship's mast. At any moment a gleam, a flash of sunlight off paint, even the swaying of a branch or bush might be the first and only signal. At that, I was to leap from the car (both doors were swinging open) and try to plug the approaching Buick before its occupants could plug us. I thought that Roland would certainly have turned back along

the road by now and that our tracks through the bush wouldn't be hard to follow. I had six rounds in the magazine and one of these was for Roland, no matter what happened; even if he got us all, I meant him to share our ignominious destiny as vulture meat.

When we'd gone about two miles on a course which we assumed to lie parallel to the road, the ground started to fall away and we appeared to be approaching a small *donga* or *spruit*—I don't think there's an exact English word for these shallow, bush-clad watercourses with their dry sandy bottoms. They're nearly always good for game because the animals can dig into the sand and find water during the dry season. We stopped to investigate, in case this watercourse was flooded, but it wasn't; there were boulders at the bottom and sand that was wet but looked firm, and some reddish shale on the sides and top.

"We ought to make it, with a bit of luck," Gemma said.

We all got out, ready to help the old Citroën up the slope with our muscles. Gemma let in the clutch and roared down the slope and into the sandy centre of the *donga*. And there the wheels stuck. The sand was softer than we'd realized. The more Gemma revved the engine, the more the wheels dug themselves in.

Without another word being said, Xenophon took an axe from the trunk—Gemma *had* thought of everything—and began to chop branches from the bush to lay in front of the wheels. I took the spade and dug out the heaped-up sand.

Then we tried again, with three pushers. She moved forward a few inches and dug in again.

"One more try," Gemma said.

"The noise?" Xenophon suggested.

He was quite right; our revving-up could probably be heard half a mile away. In order to push, I'd laid down my

rifle on the sand. It was blazing hot by now in the *donga*, the sand burned through the soles of my feet.

"I ought to stick to the gun," I said, but half-heartedly, because the only hope of shifting the car was for all of us to push with every ounce of strength in us.

I'd just turned to walk across to pick up the rifle, only three or four paces away, when a voice from above made me jump and spin around.

"Stand still," it commanded. "You're too late, Mr. Colquhoun."

I remember thinking "Well, I bought it," and cursing myself with every kind of adjective for a blundering fool. Roland's voice pricked the whole bubble; of course we'd all been self-deceiving idiots to weave ourselves a dream of escape. We ought to have gone on to Stanleyville and tried to brazen matters out with the authorities. As Roland said, it was too late.

## 12

I had only moved a pace or two from the car. Gemma was at the wheel, Xenophon and Elizabeth behind me somewhere and as paralyzed as I was. Roland was standing on the bank of the *donga* looking down at us along a rifle barrel with James on one side and the driver on the other, both with rifles, both covering us. They'd not appeared in the right place, the place where I'd expected to see them, behind us. I suppose they'd heard our engine racing, stopped the Buick and circled around to take us by surprise. Their plan had certainly succeeded. Surprised we were, and there was nothing to be done about it. There seemed nothing, even, to be said.

Elizabeth broke a curiously long silence in which the high-pitched grating of cicadas had seemed the only sound. She gave a cross between a shout and a scream and turned



and ran. Roland didn't move and didn't fire. He kept his rifle aimed steadily at me. His nerves were wonderful, he never faltered for an instant and the hope that sparked in my mind when Elizabeth created her diversion quickly died. Roland wasn't to be put off by any side issues.

"Go after her," he ordered James.

"She isn't worth it," James said surlily. "Let her go."

"I want them all. Fetch her."

James slowly slithered down the grassy slope, digging in his heels to steady himself, rifle in hand. He looked jaunty, as he always did, but tired. As he passed he touched my shoulder and said, "The jackal shouldn't come where the lion is feeding. He gets his neck bitten through." He strolled rather than walked down the *donga* and into the bush, and waved a hand to Roland. "Wait for me," he said. And that was the last I ever saw of James.

Roland and his driver started to walk carefully down the slope without for an instant leaving me uncovered. He halted about ten paces away.

"You have caused me a lot of trouble," he said. "I took you to Lua-la out of kindness, and in return you tried to interfere. You must understand that what you have tried to interfere in is something a great deal too big for a little man."

"You should have left Clausen alone," I said.

"You were like an ignorant boy who takes a brush and smears paint over the canvas of a great master. You blundered into something that lies far beyond your understanding and so your friend Dr. Clausen died. And now it is time for you."

I wondered whether, if I made a dash at Roland, it would give Gemma a chance. But I didn't see how. She had no weapon, and the other two had. Still, it might be worth a try. I could be no deader than I should be anyway in a

moment or two. Roland was looking now at Gemma. He said, "Get out of the car."

I thought she'd have more chance if she was standing in the open, so I waited.

"How many murders do you think you can get away with?" Gemma asked. Slowly, she opened the door and slid out.

"I have committed no murders," Roland said.

"You seem to be thinking of committing some now."

"It is a pity," Roland observed, "that you chose the wrong side, Gemma. You allowed the enemy to tie a bandage over your eyes. You could have helped us, and earned a place of honour and a great name."

"For God's sake get it over with," Gemma cried.

Roland paid no attention. "It is a pity," he continued, "that you were blind. You didn't see the truth, you looked at your own white skin and thought that it would bring you wealth and power. Instead of that it brings you death. Because you were a traitor, Gemma, a traitor to your own blood. I am sorry that you cannot live to see the victory of the blood you kept hidden like a secret shame."

Gemma didn't answer, she was hanging on to the door of the car for support and I think that her resources were nearly at an end. The guns looked so wicked, the day was so hot, life so sweet and the end of the adventure so fortuitous. The time had come to give her one last, and pretty hopeless, chance.

Before I could move, there was a shout from behind us in the bush and then a scream muffled by distance and the forenoon's heaviness. I'd forgotten all about Elizabeth and James. They were down the *donga* somewhere; it was a woman's scream; and then something heavy crashed about in the bush. My thoughts were slow and fumbling, I hadn't

an idea what was happening and I wondered if James was killing her. I turned my head to see.

After that, everything happened too quickly for me to be sure of the order of events. A huge black vicious missile burst out of the bush and hurtled by, missing the car's bonnet by an inch or two. It thudded past up the *donga*; Roland I think must have stepped backwards and that was his mistake. His movement deflected the trajectory of the great black cannon ball; there was a half-born scream, a thump, a glimpse of flailing limbs and pounding dark immensity; a body shot through the air and landed inertly in the bush; dust spurted up behind the feet of the avenging beast as he tossed and tossed again and kicked out his great legs behind him. I seized Gemma and dragged her behind the car and we crouched there more or less on top of Xenophon, who'd acted even more quickly. More thumps, a dreadful grunt and then the drumming of receding feet and it was all over. For a moment or two we heard the crash of branches and then all sound came to an end.

We got shakily to our feet and Gemma started to laugh. I had the greatest difficulty in not joining in; the whole thing struck me as irresistibly comic; but I just managed to fight down the hysteria and left her sitting on the running board laughing her head off, and ran forward to the scene. The rhino had done his work thoroughly. The driver I think had his neck broken and lay about twenty feet away. As for Roland, the rhino's horn had ripped his stomach up and mashed his face into the dust. There was nothing to be done for either of them. I took the rifles and sat down on the ground and was violently sick.

If James had come after us then, he could have taken the three of us singlehanded. But he didn't. I don't know why. I don't know to this day what, exactly, happened; I suppose he or Elizabeth disturbed the animal and it charged up the

*donga* in a fury and made its brief but not insignificant appearance in my life and Gemma's and, perhaps, in African history. Roland had held all the cards in his hands.

## 13

Little now remains to be said. Xenophon restored Gemma by dousing her with water and then scouted ahead to find the Buick. It wasn't far, with the key in the ignition switch and plenty of petrol. We stowed our own things in—all save a rug, which I threw over the remains of Roland.

Xenophon said, "For good men, a Christian burial. For him—" He looked up at the sky. Already, with that uncanny instinct (eyesight, really, I suppose) half a dozen vultures had gathered and were waiting in the burning sky. "We may need that rug."

"Don't you want to say a prayer for his soul, Xenophon?"

Xenophon shook his head. "His soul is with the devil." But we left the rug.

It seemed unkind to abandon James and Elizabeth, but what could we do? We had plenty of our own troubles, ahead, and the bush held plenty more rhinos.

"They can have the Citroën, if they can dig it out," I said.

"It's hard on poor Elizabeth," Gemma protested. "James has caught up with her and she's an awfully long way from Nairobi."

"They must fight their own battles, I'm afraid."

Gemma wished that we could thank the rhino somehow. Poor devils, they're shot at with everything from precision rifles plus telescopic sights to poisoned arrows, their horns are sent to India as so-called aphrodisiacs, they're trapped in game pits, their feet are made into ash trays, they're subject to every sort of indignity; and when they save your life, even then no one has a good word for them.

There were two bottles left of beer, so we poured a small

libation to the gods in thankfulness and drank to the rhino that had intervened. To all rhinos, for that matter; we hoped that fate would protect them from native bowmen, and white hunters, and film producers, and safari-proud millionaires; and that all the forces which are closing in upon the rhino as a symbol of the old Africa—Roland's nationalism and Zuckermann's big business, Rivière's administration, all the schoolmasters with their slates and literacy charts, all the developers of underdeveloped countries, absolutely everyone, it seemed, except Clausen, who had somehow got twisted off the track of progress and had died for it—we prayed that all these forces might be held in check a little longer so that our rhino and his sons might continue for a while to browse among the thorny bush, to doze in the hot shady *dongas* and to rub their itching backs against the sun-scorched boulders of their native land.

Xenophon was shocked. He did not believe in heathen gods, and libations, and wild animals, and went apart to say a Christian prayer in Latin on his own.

And so we left Dr. Bernadotte Roland, biochemist and schemer, with bluebottles already buzzing under the rug, his dreams no more; and I think we both felt for him then a certain respect, a certain regret, a certain sorrow. Like all ambitious men, he had wanted to shape events, but events had twisted him. He was of his age and time, a cork upon the great surging tides he thought he could master; no African who is educated in the Western fashion, and proud, and responsive to the currents of his day, can fail to be a nationalist. And where there is passion, scruples have no more power to restrain action than the ticks on our rhino's hide had power to control his charge. Roland saw what he wanted and went for it, and anyone who wasn't on his side was an enemy, and all enemies were born to be destroyed. Whereas Clausen was a man of charity and reason, and there-

more scruples defeated him; and so I wonder if the man of passion won't always conquer the man of reason in the end.

As for Clausen, I don't know to this day whether I shot him and he toppled off the rock as he died, or whether my shot merely broke the spell and gave him back his will power and the strength to bring about his own execution. I never shall know, but it doesn't matter. Clausen was killed by his own conscience and by the search for truth he had undertaken.

I suppose, if we'd been sensible, we should have driven the Buick back to Luala and gone straight to the French authorities. With Roland dead, we could have told our own story. One difficulty was, as I have indicated, we didn't know exactly what the story was. And Vuko was alive. Suppose he held Clausen's body with a bullet wound, and as many witnesses as he needed ready to swear to his version of the affair? After all, if anyone *had* shot Clausen it was I; as to the circumstances in which I did so, it would be my word against the word of as many eyewitnesses as Vuko chose to parade. I could not even expect help from Rivière, for I'd disobeyed his orders to keep away from Bamili Rock.

All in all, it seemed too difficult. Besides, Gemma and I were exhausted and a bit hysterical. We'd got so far along the road to Juba and we decided to go on. In Juba, we could lie low and find out what the French were up to and how the land lay; the need for extradition procedures would give us time to shape our plans. And the Sudan authorities would very likely be reluctant to co-operate with the French.

Xenophon helped us to make up our minds. When I put the choice to him, on or back, he said immediately, "We go on." He shook his head and added, "Luala is a bad place. There are wicked men in Luala and the Doctor . . ." He shook his head again very sadly. "The Doctor was a

good man. They took his soul away. I do not ever want to return to Lua-la."

So we went on.

The rest of our adventures makes another story which I cannot tell here. Things didn't turn out as we expected—they never do.

And now I've done as Gemma asked me and written everything down. It's made me realize that I don't even now know all the story, and never shall. It's like the ragged, chiffon mist that drifts across the valley outside my window as I write, half-hiding the dark shapes of the pine trees and the angle of a shed, and quite concealing the long, heathery mountain slopes that rise beyond the burn. The landscape's there all right, but I can only guess at it; sometimes the mist falls back and a new outline comes into view; sometimes it closes around my window and I stare into a grey, amorphous and mysterious world.

Another world—how utterly different from the hard, wide, rocky plains of Africa, the sharpness, the pale dust, the red rocks, the spiky stunted bushes, the wind-twisted acacias, the sparse coarse struggling grass, the mountain-forming clouds, the occasional tall cattleman with his spear and tribal scars and lofty, indrawn look; another world altogether; yet there, too, the outline of events, the shape of truth, is clouded by a mist of the mind. Of one thing only I am certain, that the nature of mind, will, and personality, and of the power of one mind over another, is as deep a mystery to us today as the properties of atoms, energy and light were to the men of the Middle Ages, and that a whole universe of new discovery awaits the scientists of the future who will abandon the study of matter for the study of mind. That was what Clausen realized, but he was too soon, as great men are, and too lonely. Future generations will regard savage practioners of forgotten arts like Vuko much as today's nu-

clear physicists regard alchemists who thought they could turn lead into gold: clumsy quacks, deceivers or self-deceived; but on the right lines, all the same, though for the wrong reasons.

I found my journal waiting for me at my father's when at last I did return. Rivière had sent it on. I cannot, I think, conclude this story better than by attaching a translation of his covering letter to my father. After explaining the circumstances in which he found the journal, and expressing his hopes for my safety, he went on:

"You will know that the mystery of the disappearance of the famous Dr. Clausen, and of his assistant Miss Young, remains a mystery still. Of hard facts, the authorities know no more than they surmised when their inquiries began: that these two persons left the camp a little before nightfall to attend a ceremony at Bamili Rock; that they walked into the forest, and disappeared. From that moment to this, although there must be many who have seen them, many who know precisely the details of their fate, no one has come forward to give the least crumb of information, everyone has denied any sight or knowledge of the Doctor's movements. So far as the authorities are concerned, he has vanished like a puff of smoke into thin air.

"As to the ceremony itself, Vuko appeared to hold nothing back. Its purpose was to give thanks for the coming of the rains and to invoke the blessings of Providence upon the new season's crops. A ram was sacrificed, prayers were said, drums were sounded, and all dispersed peacefully to their homes at the end of the night's proceedings.

"The most thorough search of the environs of this evil rock (the scene, I am convinced, of many ancient and cruel practices) failed to reveal anything that would not accord with Vuko's story. Bones were found, but they were animal. The ashes of fires, a few splashes of blood, scraps of decay-



ing meat—that was all. All, at least, that officials of the Sûreté found on their examination, which unfortunately did not take place until two days after the ceremony. I need not inform a man of your experience in the East, that in two days there is ample time to conceal the evidence of a hundred crimes, all the more in such terrain, where a body could be buried within a yard of the path without the least danger that the most rigorous search would reveal its place of concealment.

“There is only one chance, in such circumstances (and in my opinion) of obtaining the least glimmer of light, and that is through information voluntarily given; and the only chance to obtain such information is by long, slow, repeated and friendly questioning and conversation, and the exploitation of the weakness of all Africans—their jealousy for, and distrust of, one another. Such an approach is possible only to those who know them intimately and individually, and only to those whose patience is almost infinite. Unfortunately, this was not the approach adopted by the officers of the Sûreté. They obtained no information of the least value and, despite the frenzied appeals of the government in Brazzaville and indeed in Paris, in spite of the jibes, accusations and hysterical outcries of the press, in spite of the interest and attention of the whole civilized world, they quickly reached a dead end in their inquiries, and at that dead end they remain.

“The sorcerer Vuko, no doubt, was laughing up his sleeve. The strength of his hold upon the people, and the weakness of ours, had been proved a thousand times over. He was, indeed—and no doubt still is—a man of unusually strong personality, with eyes of great brilliance and a carriage erect and free, bearing in his sharp, almost aquiline features more than a trace of that Egyptian strain so often to be observed

among the tribes, and among their offshoots and neighbours, of the Nilotic Sudan.

"But Vuko's pleasure was no doubt dampened by the decision of the authorities to deport him to Madagascar and hold him there indefinitely as an enemy of public order, under the fiat of the governor-general. This action has put an end for the time being to the practices associated with Bamili Rock into which Dr. Clausen was so tragically drawn; but I am convinced that this is for the time being only. It would be unrealistic to suppose that Vuko had not made provision for such a contingency, and passed on to suitable disciples some of his knowledge and occult skill. Besides, evidence of Vuko's implication in the Clausen affair is totally lacking, and it is doubtful whether the authorities will be able to resist indefinitely pressure from elements within the French government, and from other forces known as 'world opinion' and exercised so actively by agencies of the United Nations, to restore him to the bosom of his family.

"For myself, only one further piece of information came my way. Some days after the distressing events which culminated in the disappearance of Dr. Clausen, my cook's son Tèpé brought me a small object wrapped in a large leaf. He put it into my hand saying, 'Take this, monsieur; I did not find it; someone picked it up and brought it to me. Do not ask me questions about it as I do not know where it was found.' I opened it: a bright object caught my eye. It was a brooch, in the shape of a butterfly. Not a valuable brooch; the stones were paste and the design inferior; I recognized it as an ornament often worn by Miss Young. The pathos of this cheap article, lying before me on my table and speaking mutely of a tragedy never to be fully probed, struck me to the heart.

"Naturally I did question Tèpé, but without the least result. The brooch, he said, had been brought to him by a

man he did not recognize, and he had given two hundred francs for it. I paid him the money. I should, of course, have delivered the brooch at once to those in charge of the investigation, but I must admit that, at this moment, I was overwhelmed by chagrin. My superiors have seen fit to dismiss me summarily from my position in the civil service, on the grounds that I had neglected my duties in permitting such events to occur. Well, I was the scapegoat, and when my anger had calmed I saw the reason, if not the justice, of this development. Someone's head had to fall, and I was no doubt the logical victim. And so, in my resentment, I kept the brooch, and have it still. As it turned out, my dismissal was a blessing in disguise. I am glad to say that I have since been able to secure employment at once both more congenial, and better paid.

"There remains only the possibility that I may be able to furnish a few details with which you are still unfamiliar in regard to the disappearance of your son. You will, of course, have been notified already of all that is officially known. As it fell to me, however, to 'rescue' and to conduct the first questioning of those two unfortunate young Africans, James Gichini and the girl Elizabeth, I may be able to add a few details.

"I say 'unfortunate' because, although there is no doubt that James Gichini was deeply implicated in Dr. Roland's schemes for a pan-African nationalist movement with himself as the head,<sup>1</sup> he was at all times the tool rather than the hand, the jackal rather than the lion; and his experience in the bush near the borders of the A.E.F. and the Sudan, after

<sup>1</sup> On rereading my journal, I see that Dr. Roland himself gave me a very plain hint of his ambitions, which passed over my head. "I fell in love while I was there," he said, speaking of his period as a student in London. "Or perhaps I realized who it was I loved, and ever since I have been faithful." His love, I imagine, was for the symbolic figure of nationalism or freedom—one of the graces, or one of the furies? He did remain faithful, anyway.

the destruction of his master, surely earned him the right to a little sympathy.

"When he and his companion discovered what had occurred, and realized that they had been abandoned in the bush with an immobile motorcar, James gave way to despair. He was, after all, a man of the city, not of the bush, and lacked the ruthless will power of his master. In attempting to regain the so-called 'road,' where they might have been found, he lost his head and lost his way—an easy enough error, as anyone who has trekked on foot in those regions, without guide or landmark, too well knows. The bush is featureless; no distant hills offer themselves as landmarks; visibility is always limited. Fear of encountering another rhino, or some such wild beast, fuddled whatever wits remained to James Gichini. He and his Elizabeth wandered for the rest of that day and the day following and would, I suspect, have lain down that night to die of sheer despair and exhaustion had they not been found by a small party of hunters returning to their kraals.

"These nomads took charge of James and Elizabeth, fed and revived them, and in due course reported their existence to my colleague in charge of the district whose borders march with those of the Sudan. In view of the lack of communications and the sparseness of the district, ten days elapsed before I was sent to retrieve these two missing persons and convey them to Lua-la.

"James Gichini attempted, at first, to throw the blame for everything on to your son and to accuse him of the murder of Dr. Clausen. But even he seemed bound by some mysterious yet potent prohibition on the mention of all matters connected with Bamili Rock. He denied that he had ever been there or attended the ceremony, and vowed that he had spent the night waiting in Roland's car at Clausen's camp. He was, of course, lying, but nothing would bring him to

tell a different story and every effort on the part of the officers of the Sûreté came up against a blank wall.

"It was therefore impossible to accept at their face value his accusations against your son, which he failed to substantiate. At this time there was a move to issue a warrant for Mr. Colquhoun's arrest on a charge of murder and to press the government of the Sudan to instigate a thorough search. But, after much deliberation, it was held that the evidence was insufficient to justify this course. Evidence of any kind, indeed, scarcely existed: even the theory that Dr. Clausen had been murdered was based upon assumption and not proof.

"The only individual who appeared to be telling all she knew was Elizabeth, and her depositions were favourable to your son, at least in respect of the suspicion of murder. But she knew nothing at first hand of the events at Bamili Rock, for she had spent the night with Xenophon and Miss Gemma waiting in the hired Citroën. She reported that your son had told her that Dr. Clausen was dead and that Roland had killed him, but this could scarcely be accepted as evidence. She hated Roland, and remained touchingly attached to your son, although (I hasten to add) he had done nothing, so far as my observation went, to encourage her; in fact his embarrassment at her attachment to him had struck me as at once pathetic and droll. Are not the cankers of jealousy, distrust and hatred so rife in the world that we should esteem the buds of love and respect wherever they may be found? But then, your son's affections were already engaged, and, if I may say so, I consider that his choice does honour alike to his heart and to his head.

"The only point upon which James and his Elizabeth (both of whom were subsequently repatriated to Kenya) were able to satisfy us was the fate of Dr. Bernadotte Roland. Our discovery of the abandoned Citroën and of a torn blanket—











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